

# NICHOLAS II

*Prisoner of the Purple*

*By*

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*Translated by*

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AND



Of Russia's years now dawns the worst of all ;  
From the anointed head the crown will fall !  
All love for Little Father is forgot  
For death and famine are his peoples' lot.  
Consuming plague is stalking through the land ;  
Unsheltered by a law's protecting hand,  
The blood of mothers and of babes runs red  
Whilst flames incarnadine the rivers' bed.

LERMONTOV, *Prophecies*, 1829.

## FOREWORD

**T**HIS book might be termed an historical biography rather than a biographical novel. All events described herein actually took place ; the words in quotation marks actually were spoken. To be sure, certain indirect statements, gleaned from memoirs and documents, have been presented as direct quotations. Some of the minor occurrences, too, have been rearranged as to sequence. No attempt has been made to portray the history of Russia under Nicholas II ; rather a picture has been presented of the Czar's life prior to, during, and after his reign. Although dealing with recent history, the bizarre world which is depicted might well be some saga of far-distant centuries.

The life of Nicholas II can be comprehended only if it is regarded as a myth, because the esoteric plane on which the Czar dwelt was remote from the lowlands of a workaday world. Hardly twenty years separate us from the time of Nicholas II. Yet that epoch seems so far removed that, in order to understand it, a number of prejudices and conceptions, deeply rooted in the Western mind, must be suspended.

The tragic figure of Nicholas II is one grossly misjudged in world history. No reproach, no insinuation, no disparagement was spared him during his lifetime. Even to-day—years after his death—the Czar's personality is distorted almost beyond recognition by exaggerations, calumnies, and prejudices.

The guilt of this avalanche of lies and slander should, perhaps, be attributed less to premeditated forgeries than to the yardstick with which the ill-starred Czar usually is measured. Nicholas II should not suffer the sober scrutiny of a rational historian. Only from the exalted height of irrational feeling can the life of the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias be appreciated fully, and judged correctly. Only in that light is it possible to recognize the radiant features of the bearer of a mystical faith. As the Don Quixote of Autocracy, Nicholas II necessarily became one of the most unfortunate figures of his time because of contradictions arising from the essence of his power on one hand, and the outside world on the other.

If the present volume succeeds in conveying a clearer understanding of the tragic fate of Nicholas II ; if the intrinsic reasons which induced the imperial actions are easier to grasp ; and if the reader perceives, behind the thick wall of prejudice and ignorance, the human qualities of a lonely victim destined to tread the path of autocracy, the author's purpose has been achieved.

MOHAMMED ESSAD-BEY.

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# NICHOLAS II

## CHAPTER ONE

THE 13TH OF MARCH, 1881

THE heavy booming of the fortress clock tore through the frosty silence of St. Petersburg. The clock struck a quarter to one. Slowly and ceremoniously, the bronze-ornamented gates of the Winter Palace opened. Softly the silver bells of the imperial troika jingled.

Surrounded by six Terek cossacks, the sixty-four-year-old Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, the Most Orthodox Czar Alexander II, drove to the Sunday parade at the *mandé*. Wrapped in his furs, his large blue eyes staring into distance, his brow furrowed, and his right hand clenched into a fist, the Emperor resembled an angry demi-god that day.

The many plots and assassinations in his country failed to ruffle the Emperor. With his habitual punctuality he strolled in the park, and reviewed parades. Having abolished serfdom in his country, the Czar believed that he could trust his people.

As the troika followed its usual course, twelve-year-old Niki, oldest grandson of the Czar, finished his Sunday luncheon in a distant room of the Winter Palace. On occasions of state, Nicholas was addressed as "His Imperial Highness Grandduke Nicholai Alexandrovitch." At such ceremonies he wore the uniform of an officer of the Preobrashensky Guard and saluted his imperial grandfather in military fashion.

In that secluded corner of the Winter Palace, however, he was just Niki. There he played in a sailor-suit, and was happy that luncheon was over, that it had frozen outside, and that, at three o'clock in the afternoon, together with Mother and Cousin Sandro, he would go ice skating. At half-past two, Niki kissed his mother's hand and, with not a little anticipation, scrutinized the shining ice skates suspended from the Grandduchess's arm.

Mother and son stepped to the window. Before their eyes spread the severe grandeur of the Palace Square. In the centre of the gigantic rondel, like beauty turned into stone, arose the Alexander Column. Before it, as if rooted to the ground, a lonely guardsman stood motionless. Any minute now, thirteen-year-old Sandro, Niki's best friend, would appear on the scene.

One, two, three—the strokes of the clock sounded, breaking the bewitched silence of the Palace Square. Simultaneously, as if these

strokes mysteriously opened the door to another world, a terrific detonation resounded. Mother and son stared at one another.

"A bomb!" the Grandduchess shouted, clutching Niki tightly. And as their eyes roved across the Square the windows of the old palace trembled from a second, even more terrific, explosion.

The Grandduchess rushed from the room, Niki at her heels. The great vestibule in the basement of the palace was crowded with people. Officers of the Guard, cossacks, servants, courtiers filled the room.

"The Emperor has been assassinated," somebody cried.

"No, he is only severely wounded," contradicted another.

Then there was quiet. Niki's eyes widened in terror as he saw four huge cossacks carry in the bleeding body of the Czar through the open door. Grandduke Michael showed them the way. Big, red blotches appeared on the marble steps of the palace. Niki followed the incarnadined track. In the study, the body of the Czar was gently bedded upon a divan. Granddukes rushing about, pell-mell, presently filled the room.

At the window, his broad back turned towards the room, stood heir-apparent Alexander, Niki's father. Shaking with fright, Niki gazed upon his dying grandfather, at once fascinated and revolted. The right foot of the Czar had been severed from the body, the left had been terribly maimed. Innumerable wounds covered face and body. One eye was closed, the other stared ahead, expressionless, in the most fearsome fashion. Niki finally tore his own eyes away from that prostrated hulk of the man and looked about him. His mother, Maria Feodorovna, stood beside him, her trembling hands still holding the ice skates. Somebody touched Niki's shoulder. It was Sandro, the little grandduke, with whom he had arranged to go skating.

The great study was furnished in the style of the *Empire*. With its innumerable pictures, art objects and bric-a-brac, it made an over-decorated impression. A stifling silence prevailed now that Transitoriness revealed its merciless grimace to the members of the ruling house. The red blotches on the divan grew ever bigger and darker. The Emperor's heavy breathing turned into a death-rattle.

Niki trembled. In all its abrupt confusion, death entered his consciousness. Until that day, the mention of death always had been avoided in his presence. Members of the ruling house did not die; they merely rested in God.

A shrill scream rent the heavy silence. The door opened and a tall woman in a pink dressing-gown rushed into the room. Her pale face was distorted. She threw herself upon the body of the Emperor, covering the blood-stained, disfigured face with fervent kisses. The desperation of Princess Jurevskaya,morganatic consort of Alexander, was genuine enough. She alone, perhaps, was the one human being in the entire palace who really had clung to him with a loyal love.

The grandduchesses began to weep. Niki's eyes, too, filled with tears. At that moment he felt the heavy hand of his father upon his shoulder. "Steady, now!" the heir-apparent whispered.

The President of the St. Petersburg Police entered hastily in obvious excitement. Approaching the heir to the throne, he breathlessly reported details of the catastrophe.

After the parade, the Emperor had been driven through the Engineers' Alley to the Catherine Canal. Passing Michailov's Garden, an unknown passer-by threw a bomb in front of the troika. Two cossacks and a boy fell to the ground. The Emperor remained unharmed. Although Colonel Dvorjitzky, Commandant of the Palace Guard, implored the Emperor to return to the palace immediately, Alexander insisted upon alighting from the carriage. As he bent over the injured, an excited bystander approached the monarch and asked : " You are unhurt, Your Majesty ? "

" Thank God, nothing happened to me," Alexander replied.

Hearing these words, the assassin, meanwhile caught and manacled, raised his head, laughed grimly, and shouted : " Don't praise the day before the evening."

At that very moment, an unknown man threw a second bomb which exploded directly at the feet of the Emperor.

Here, the Police President's recital was interrupted. The imperial private physician approached the Emperor, felt his pulse, and solemnly pronounced : " His Majesty the Emperor has passed on."

Everybody sank to their knees. A full head taller than anybody else, the new Czar knelt at Niki's left side. The eyes of the granddukes rested expectantly upon their new ruler.

At that moment Alexander III felt the heavy burden of Czardom descend upon his shoulders, causing a sudden and remarkable change in him. Niki observed his father, utterly bewildered. He was no longer that friendly giant who bent thick silver roubles in his powerful hands and tied iron rods into knots. There was a strange gleam in the blue eyes of the new Czar. The realization that he now was omnipotent Czar, by the Grace of God, had taken hold of him. His broad chest and shoulders seemed to expand still more. The granddukes felt that, in that magical moment, the shadow of the imperial giant seemed to spread over his entire, vast realm.

Alexander III arose. The Police President glanced up at him timidly. " What is Your Majesty's command ? " he inquired.

" Command ? Oh, yes, of course," Alexander replied. Then, gazing severely at the official, he spoke : " It appears the police have lost their head completely. I herewith command that the Army take over the maintenance of order in my residential city. The Council of Ministers is to wait on me immediately at the Anitchkov Palace." So saying, Alexander indicated to his consort to follow him. With firm tread, he left the room.

His small pale face pressed against the cold window pane, Nicholas watched his father stride to his coach with gigantic steps through the lines of his people. Mounted cossacks surrounded the Czar while the ruddy afterglow of the setting sun reddened the steel of their lances.

Huzzas were shouted. Alexander greeted his subjects. Above the

clamour of the multitude and the hoof-beats of the horses his mighty voice resounded across the palace grounds: "I shall be a father to my people."

The day after the bloody inauguration of his rule Alexander III issued his first manifesto. It concluded with the words: "We command that all Our faithful subjects serve Us and Our heir to the throne, Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicolai Alexandrovitch, in eternal fealty."

While the manifesto of the Czar was proclaimed in the provinces of the realm, the Anitchkov Palace, home of the imperial family, buzzed with activity. With all possible speed, trunks were packed, orders were issued, and preparations were made for an early departure.

The departure was very much in the nature of a flight. It was during the night, under cover of darkness, that the imperial family left in carriages. Accompanied by cossacks, they were driven to the station. The depot was surrounded by troops, the train already waiting. It bore the imperial family to the gloomy castle Gatshina, in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg.

In that dark and deserted palace, cut off from the entire world, living more like a prisoner than a Czar, Alexander III spent the first years of his reign. By his side, in the mouldy old rooms of the castle, a frail boy grew up, with beautifully shaped eyes, slender limbs and delicate, small hands—His Imperial Highness, the Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicolai Alexandrovitch, heir to the throne of All the Russias.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GATSHINA

**A** LARGE park, its still pond mirroring the noble contours of swans. Straight, clean, and deserted lanes. A zoological garden, silent soldiers guarding the cages behind which animals prowl, sad and shy. The yellow, bare, and lifeless palace, in the midst of the park, appears to be yet another cage in which the mightiest man of Russia has voluntarily immured himself.

Gatshina ! Many years ago, cut off from the world like Alexander III, a small pug-nosed man with a face of greenish hue and nervously twitching lips dwelt here. This ugly dwarf forced his soldiers to drill on the dusty parade ground all day long, until they collapsed from sheer exhaustion. This drilling lasted for fully twenty years. At last, the lone occupant of Gatshina received word of the death of his mother, Empress Catherina.

In dream-like ecstasy the little man mounted his steed and, at a wild gallop, rushed through the darkness of the night until he had covered the stretch that separated Gatshina from the Winter Palace. Arrived there, he sprang off his horse and, with skipping gait, ascended the marble staircase. Flunkeys opened the doors wide and Paul I, in high riding boots, a long sword in his hand, and fiery-eyed, darted into the *salon* of the Empress—and, simultaneously, into the history of the world.

Somehow, the spirit of mad Paul remained over Gatshina. The rulers of Russia avoided the gloomy palace until Alexander III isolated himself there.

Surprisingly enough Alexander did not occupy the comfortable rooms on the first floor. Instead, he moved into the small mezzanine where, in Paul's time, only servitors had been quartered. The tiny, mouldy rooms were furnished by the Emperor with upholstered velvet furniture, arranged along the walls. The plain, cheap wallpaper was covered with family photographs and only with the greatest difficulty could a piano be placed in the largest room of the apartment.

The new Emperor intended to lead a retired, quiet family life in these simple surroundings. As much as possible Czar and Czarina avoided the ornate Winter Palace, where the marble staircase was incarnadined with the blood of a Czar. Alexander III disliked visits of relatives as much as state occasions. The seclusion of Gatshina allowed the Czar to devote his entire time and enormous energy to the duties of government.

Czar and Czarina lead an idyllic family life. The harmony and happiness of their marriage was the first impression impinged upon

young Nicholas's consciousness. To be sure, Niki did not know that this exemplary marriage had been incepted by accident.

The Danish Princess Dagmar originally had been chosen as consort for Alexander's older brother, Czarevitch Nicholai. Dagmar loved this friendly, elegant man tenderly. When he died, shortly before the wedding, the unbending will of the Emperor decreed that Princess Dagmar must marry the next grandduke in line, the grim Alexander. That the Princess, as Empress Maria Feodorovna, led a happy family life after all was primarily due to the dogmatic and pedantic marital fanaticism which imbued her husband.

Nicholas, the eldest scion of this marriage, was a sensitive and silent child. He loved the animals of the Gatshina zoo but avoided people, although they rarely enough intruded upon the privacy of the imperial family. Stolid indifference characterized his early contacts with people. The marked restraint which he manifested throughout his life, in every gesture and impulse, may well have been the result of his secluded childhood in Gatshina.

It was only in the summer, in the sub-tropical Livadia Castle in the Crimea, or when visiting his grandparents in Denmark, that his odd indifference disappeared for a few short weeks. When Nicholas watched the distant sails of passing boats from a rock in Livadia, his eyes would sparkle with boyish delight.

Niki's modest behaviour went hand in hand with an unshakeable optimism. As a young child, he had formed the conviction that behind the broad back of his father and under the blissful protection of an invisible power, nothing evil could befall him. But only in the midst of the closest family circle, while playing with his brothers or cousins, did Nicholas dare emerge from that shell of neutral disinterestedness which was his most outstanding characteristic.

Alexander III, as robust and unaffected as his style of living, left nothing undone to make life bright for his five children. His three sons, Nicholas, George, and Michael, and his two daughters, Xenia and Olga, grew up at Gatshina in an atmosphere of marital bliss. When the Emperor lifted one of his children high up in the air with his powerful arms, his eyes glowed with paternal pride. And the eyes of the children bespoke their admiration when this huge man, with his strong fingers, tore whole decks of cards to pieces as if they were slips of thin paper.

Although the mother always observed a certain European coolness in her relations to her children, there was a spirit of rough and ready affection between father and sons. Time and again, the inhabitants of Gatshina observed the Czar, his arms thrown about his sons' shoulders, driving in a carriage, his own mighty shoulders shaking with laughter over some remark from his children.

Strangely enough, this ideal paterfamilias neglected to impress his eldest son with the realization of his future importance and position. In the circle of his family, the Czar refrained from everything which reminded him of his governmental duties. Since he detested political

conversations, the attention of the heir to the throne was exclusively centred upon everyday details.

Alexander was absolutely sincere in the belief that the heir-apparent, in order to rule effectively, would require neither an excellent education nor extraordinary gifts. He thought the Grace of God, which descends upon a monarch at the moment of anointment, would endow his son with the necessary attributes of a ruler to a far greater degree than all the teachings of ordinary tutors or educators.

Young Nicholas dwelt in the patriarchal atmosphere of a peaceful, noble house, somewhat in the style of Turgenev. Liberal intercourse among human beings and a clear discernment of the world as it really was, were completely eliminated. That other world which overtook him in later years, behind the threshold of the palace, was, for Nicholas, full of unusual, confusing and frightening occurrences.

In Gatshina, or at the summer castle Livadia, ensconced in the lap of his gigantic father, life seemed simple and understandable. Throughout his life Nicholas never succeeded in overcoming this physical infantilism, artificially engendered and nurtured. All his life long he yearned for the narrow circle within which everything was so easy, so certain, and so uncomplicated.

As he grew older Nicholas never was permitted to utter any opinion about ministers, officials, or affairs of state. Although heir to the throne and second man of the realm, Niki was considered merely a subject of his father Alexander and it would have been indeed surprising if he suddenly had dared to express a personal opinion. The feeling of complete safety within the walls of the palace encouraged in Nicholas a vast indifference to all events that occurred outside the palace walls.

Niki never wished for toys other than those which happened to be in his room. He had no desire for other playmates than the brothers and cousins who surrounded him constantly. Childish curiosity and interest in strange worlds was unknown to him. By a staggering event the youthful mind of Nicholas had formed the belief that the world outside the palace was full of bombs, conspiracies, and death itself. The long series of plots against his grandfather's life, and through which he himself had lived half-consciously, had not passed without leaving tell-tale traces in the soul and mind of the child.

Grandduke Alexander Nicolaievitch records in his memoirs that, during the last years of the reign of Alexander II, the imperial family had come to suspect a herald of death in every stranger, every guest, and every lackey. A single step outside the palace might mean catastrophe! The wide world of mysterious people therefore appeared to the child a fearsome place, constantly disseminating misfortune and to be strictly shunned. Nicholas reacted with utter indifference to this world which he was never permitted to enter and out of which, he believed, only evil came. Tales of the unknown world, occasionally told to the Czarevitch by his nearest relatives, always ended with the admonition that tragedy would overtake him if he so much as dared leave the walls of Gatshina Castle. Young Nicholas had seen with his

own eyes the dire fate that had befallen the old Emperor on the 13th of March, 1881.

If a teacher or a guest told Nicholas about the great steppes, or the noisy cities of the country, there would appear on his face that distrust and apathy for everything strange, unknown, and new which he was destined to retain during his entire life.

The education provided by his father was not suited to free Nicholas from his elementary feeling of suspicion. With great care—albeit after his own rather odd taste—the Czar selected tutors for the heir to the throne. While the boy's general education was entrusted to Mr. Heath, a wise and elderly Englishman, scientific instruction evolved upon Constantin Petrovitch Pobedonostsev, one of the highest ecclesiastical officers of the realm, as infamous as he was famous.

Pobedonostsev enjoyed the reputation of being the most reactionary, the most astute and cynical man in All the Russias. His appearance was so repulsive as to be almost enervating. Cadaverous, with a parchment-like skin and hollow cheeks, the small eyes of a lizard and bloodless lips, he resembled a frightening spectre rather than an educator of a young, sensitive prince. In his youth Pobedonostsev had been Alexander III's tutor and the reactionary dogmas with which he had instilled his pupil had decided the Emperor to appoint him as mentor of his son.

Every ounce of his unflagging strength and energy Pobedonostsev dedicated to the maintenance of canonical order within the Russian Empire. Let the godless heretic peoples of the West roll in the mire of liberal freedom; in Holy Russia, under the watchful eye of Pobedonostsev, not one stone, not one tree, not one official was permitted to change a God-imposed status. To Pobedonostsev the Russian Empire was the torch of God's will on earth. Through centuries—nay, through thousands of years—this realm was destined to pass on to future generations the fundamental tenets of Orthodox Christianity, and of unbending fealty to the Czar. The very essence of the Russian Empire was its fight against the heathenish chaos inherent in humanity. In the eyes of Pobedonostsev man was naught but the vessel of the devil and the Evil One could be driven out only by the cross.

Of muggy nights, in his own apartment in St. Petersburg, Pobedonostsev would indulge in dramatic exorcisms. In the presence of ecclesiastical authorities he would labour over the body of an epileptic. Pointing to the twitchings of his victim, he would pride himself on driving out a demon. When battling Satan, by intoning magical formulas, the malevolent old man must have seemed more like a magician than the supreme head of the Russian Church.

It had been Pobedonostsev who had advised the Czar to isolate himself in old Gatshina. The letters which he, as Procurator of the Holy Synod, dispatched to the monarch breathed such reactionary spirit that Alexander himself once admitted: "One could freeze to death, just listening to him all the time."

This lonely and evil man had but one genuine friend. Every Satur-

day, at about nine o'clock, a pale, lean man, with a small beard and extraordinary magnetic eyes, visited him. Until far into the night, the two men would debate the fate of the Empire and the spirit of Holy Russia. The friend was none other than Feodor Dostoevsky, and the friendship between the great poet and the great reactionary proves that, after all, Pobedonostsev was more than an evil old man of unswerving doctrines.

Pobedonostsev introduced the works of Dostoevsky into the castles of the granddukes. Alexander III always had a copy of *The Demons* on his desk. Now and then the strange pair would drive to the palace in a coach. There, the youthful granddukes were treated to prophetic words from the poet on the spirit of Holy Russia.

When Dostoevsky died, Pobedonostsev wrote a heart-rending letter to the Czar, pointing to the death of the poet as Russia's greatest loss. He wrote: "To-day, Feodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky has been interred in Nemsky Monastery. It is sad indeed that he is no longer among us. For me, this is a most cruel loss. There is no one who can assume his place."

Pobedonostsev was one of the best-educated people in Russia. His enormous erudition, however, filled him with the deepest contempt for the world of exact sciences. The triumph of the conservative spirit was not to be blocked by scientific scepticism! It was conceptions and dogmas of this kind which guided the educator of the future Czar.

Every morning, from eight to eleven, and every afternoon, from two to six, Nicholas bent over scientific studies. During the rest of the day he painted, went hunting, and played music with his tutor Heath. Every minute of the eight-year plan of study for his pupil was carefully supervised by Pobedonostsev.

According to old Russian tradition, the heir to the throne was neither permitted to attend school nor to be reared together with other children. Teachers chosen by Pobedonostsev had to journey to Gatshina daily to instruct the young Czarevitch in his lessons. Aside from languages, which he speedily mastered to such an extent that his Russian frequently sounded as if it were translated from the English, the subjects embraced religion, the history of the Orthodox Church, and the comparative history of all faiths. Then there was Russian literature and grammar, Russian history, world history, foreign literature, geography as well as elementary and higher mathematics.

For this comprehensive curriculum, which was augmented by military studies of all kinds, Pobedonostsev had invented a singular and cynical method of instruction. Teachers were neither permitted to subject their exalted pupil to tests, nor were they allowed to question him. They entered, bowed deeply, delivered a lecture, and frequently left with the uneasy feeling that, possibly, their pupil had paid no attention whatever to their well-prepared talks. During these lessons, Nicholas would remain motionless in his chair, his face merely expressing polite attention. He displayed the same indifferent equanimity

to the words of his teachers as in later years when listening to the reports of his ministers.

The various teachers, imparting diversified instruction, did not leave an especially deep impression on him. "Colonel Leer visited me for a full hour and tired me terribly," Nicholas jotted into his diary. Of General Pusirevsky, who supervised the military education of the heir to the throne, he wrote: "Pusirevsky was with me all morning. He bored me so much that I almost fell asleep."

Only Pobedonostsev and Heath had a decided influence on the stolid, close-mouthed youth. Nicholas's liking for sports, throughout his life, was infused by the astute Britisher. From Pobedonostsev, he accepted the secret wisdom of the magical power of Czardom. This wisdom Pobedonostsev clothed in a phrase originated during the reign of Nicholas I: while the French revolution had written on its banner the words Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, the very foundation of Czaristic absolutism were Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Tradition.

The monotonous life at Gatshina and Livadia, or at one of the Baltic Sea resorts, hermetic seclusion from the outer world, and bloody memories of the 13th of March, 1881, along with the reactionary influence of the venerable cynic, moulded young Nicholas.

The routine was interrupted by important events only rarely. At seventeen, Nicholas was declared of age and took the triple oath of a grandduke, of a subject, and of the heir to the throne. He was made a member of the State Council and was apportioned a grandducal appanage of 210,000 rubles a year.

His personal life was not touched by these events. Ecclesiastical and secular teachers still unfolded to him the wisdom of past centuries, while the stern glance of Pobedonostsev hovered over him. Residing at Gatshina, far from the metropolis, listening to innumerable lectures which left no greater impression than the bubbling of a distant fountain, this mode of life eventually became second nature to him.

In his later life as Czar, Nicholas preferred quiet palaces outside the great cities. There, with hands folded, he listened to the tedious reports of his ministers. The only interruption of this monotonous routine was the short span of time between the termination of his studies and his succession to the throne.

In the year 1890, the Czarevitch's diary contains the jubilant entry: "To-day I have definitely and forever finished studying." It was in that year that Nicholas moved into his own palace in Peterhof and entered upon the free life of a young grandduke.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DAVID AND GOLIATH

**A**LEXANDER III reminded one of nothing so much as an elongated rectangle. His mighty physique was square throughout : his elongated skull, his reddish beard, his large fleshy hands—all were consistently square in shape. Invariably, Alexander III wore a double-breasted uniform, making his gigantic figure appear even more colossal. His personality had a touch of the ornamental, the primordial and indestructible. He spoke in a loud and deep voice which never changed its pitch ; the rare movements of his hands were categorical, commanding, and forceful.

The Czar's ideal was an autocratic, agronomical-feudalistic order of things. Sarcastic tongues claimed that the quiescence which he decreed was that of a cemetery. However, this was not so ; by no means was Alexander an enemy of progress. True enough, progress had to be inaugurated solely and exclusively by him. It was he who built the great Trans-Siberian Railroad, longest in the world. It was he who made possible the gigantic financial reform which founded Russia's wealth until 1905 ; he, too, erected schools, built canals, and financed factories. But he never forgot that he had ascended the throne on the 13th of March, 1881, the very day that a terrorist's bomb had struck down his father's great bulk. It was this bloody event which decided the entire conception of life of the last absolute autocrat of Europe. He watched the clan of the world's monarchs gradually vanish—an observation which filled him with utter contempt for the crowned weaklings who granted written constitutions, thus escaping their innate responsibility to rule by the Grace of God.

When the Russian ambassador at Lisbon submitted to the Czar a report of the festive opening of the Portuguese parliament, Alexander III made the marginal note : "Monkey business." When the Turkish sultan considered a liberal reform, the Czar commented bitterly : "He is no longer a sultan ; he is just an old fogey." And when King Milan of Serbia renounced his throne, the monarch penned on the report the single short word : "Oaf !"

It was Alexander's wont to remark among his intimate circle : "How undignified is the position of a constitutional monarch !" Every constitutional ruler incurred the hatred of the Czar. He called Queen Victoria "a gossipy old woman" ; William II he described as "a lunatic who might be expected to do almost anything." Even the autocratic rulers of his time did not escape the sharp criticism of Alexander III. The Shah of Persia, for example, he considered "a beast," and when the Emir of Bokhara sent the Czar a contribution of

a hundred thousand rubles to alleviate the famine on the Volga Alexander opined: "Very nice of him. To be sure, he stole the money."

In his vast realm, the Czar permitted no sign, however slight, of liberal thought. After the death of the Belgian Prince Baldwin, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, "in the name of the Imperial Government," expressed sympathy to the royal Belgian house. In connection with this, the Czar wrote: "What does he mean by 'Imperial Government'? Thank God, we have no constitution." From the Czar's autocratic viewpoint there was no Government in Russia at all. There was only the Czar, and the officials who had to obey him.

Within a few years, the strong hands of the Czar throttled the Liberalism to which his father had fallen victim—a development which filled the old reactionary generals with enthusiasm. "He is like Peter the Great with his knout!" Minister of War Vannovsky remarked to Foreign Minister Giers. The latter shook his head sorrowfully. "No," he replied, "it's just the knout without Peter the Great."

And yet Alexander III by no means proved the worst ruler in the long line of Romanovs. In his soul he harboured a mighty one-sided love for this miraculous, interminable Russia—the strongest and most autocratic country in the world. To be sure, this love was as despotic, self-willed, and gigantic as everything was about this strange man. It was with intense pride that Alexander III surveyed All the Russias and matching this pride was his great contempt for everything foreign.

During one of many conflicts when Europe's peace depended upon the word of the Czar, Alexander III commanded the foreign diplomats to wait on him in his palace, where he would acquaint them with his all-highest decision. The diplomats appeared to a man, but the Czar could be found nowhere. The excited Minister of Foreign Affairs first searched the entire palace in vain, then the park. At last, he found the Czar peacefully fishing in a pool. "Your Majesty," the Minister cried, "the whole of Europe is waiting for you."

"Europe can wait if the Czar of Russia feels like fishing," Alexander replied with a scornful glance at his minister. Eventually, he appeared before the diplomats and stated succinctly: "As long as I live, there will be no war in Europe!"

The word of the Czar could be depended upon implicitly. Although he spoke sparingly, he consistently kept his word. Abiding faith in their Czar was, according to his opinion, the sole prerogative to which his subjects were entitled.

Alexander's own education had not been very comprehensive. Therefore, it was his belief that, in order to rule his realm, a monarch needed only sound common sense, and the help of God. Court ceremonies, etiquettes, and comity were frowned upon by the Czar. Ministers, in all candour, could tell him: "What Your Majesty just stated, is plain nonsense." If they were right, the Czar would not

object to such blunt language. However, when Alexander noticed that one of his ministers was leading a life not entirely above criticism, he summoned a flunkey and, in the very midst of a cabinet council, he pointed an accusing finger at the unfortunate statesman and commanded: "Throw that dirty dog out."

Those ministers in whom he had confidence could rely upon him completely. When Minister of Finance Witte proposed his great financial reform, he waited on the Czar with the intention of submitting a detailed outline of his objectives. The Czar listened to Witte for a time, only to interrupt with the remark: "My dear Sergius Julievitch, I am unable to follow your lecture. But I have full confidence in you, and I herewith sanction your reform." And Alexander could not be swayed when innumerable objectors to Witte's plan tried to influence him, subsequently, against the financial reform. Witte's plan, involving the devaluation of the rouble, materialized; it was the first devaluation of international importance.

Alexander III was not a particularly remarkable man. However, he was the last of Russia's rulers who realized precisely what it meant to be Czar. His simple honesty, his gigantic physique, and his candid disdain of everything foreign assured him of his power much more than did the persecution of revolutionaries. Mighty, full of naïve pride in his Russian ways, Alexander strode through world history as the last heir of a Christian-Byzantine, agronomical, pious, and autocratic Russia. The very Colossus of Autocracy, he surrounded himself with huge and fearless men, loud of voice, and plain of manner like himself. Although devoid of all elegance, they were endowed with a dependable intuition for the weal, the honour and the future of Holy Czarist Russia.

In the atmosphere of this tedious giant, Nicholas felt himself small, forsaken, and overwhelmed. There was not one among his father's circle to befriend him; indeed, his own father was not his friend.

It was Alexander's intention to bequeath to his son and heir to the throne two other treasures besides one-sixth of the world: Understanding of the last secrets of the realm and of the very essence of Czarism; and a standard of morals unyielding in their rigour. Alexander himself was the most moral person within the boundaries of his Empire. Aghast, and in shocked amazement, he regarded examples of loose morality which, according to him, actually fermented revolutions. In the eyes of Alexander III, adherence to the seventh commandment was infinitely more important than education, wisdom, and love of humanity.

The heir to the throne was an enigma to the Czar. His small, frail figure, his soft face, the never-changing, always slightly bored expression in his eyes was something the Czar could not comprehend. To be sure, the polite, empty words of the youth, his quiet manners, his soft, unobtrusive ways, might hide a profound inner life and Byzantine shrewdness—or just a limited mentality. As a Czar, Alexander leaned towards the first assumption; as a man, contemptuous of humanity in general, the latter conclusion seemed more tenable.

When a minister pointed out to the Czar that the time had come to induct the heir to the throne into affairs of state and suggested that the Czarevitch be made Chairman of the Committee for the Construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, the Czar appeared surprised. "Tell me," he asked, "have you ever spoken to His Imperial Highness, the Grandduke-Czarevitch?" The minister answered in the affirmative, whereupon the Czar exclaimed bitterly: "Don't tell me you never noticed that the Grandduke is a dunce!"

There never was an occasion for Alexander to reproach his son; on the other hand, there never was any reason to praise the Czarevitch. After having tea with his imperial parents, Nicholas never forgot to say: "*Merci, maman,*" or "*Merci, papa.*" Whenever there was a birthday in the family, the Czarevitch was sure to send a present. He was always attentive and polite; perhaps even too polite. Not once, in the presence of the Czar, did he utter a desire, an opinion, or evince the slightest emotion. It was as though he were covered with a glossy lacquer.

When the Czarevitch attended a comedy, he would laugh; when he witnessed a drama, his eyes would fill with tears. Visiting the officers' casinos, he stood stiffly at attention when a toast was proposed to the Czar. But despite all this, Alexander had the uncomfortable feeling that all these manifestations were not human emotions; rather, they resembled astonishingly precise reactions of a perfect automaton.

It was almost with amazement that the gigantic Czar listened when his young son, in a quiet, even voice, reported that he had had tea with Uncle Vladimir yesterday; that he had had a wonderful time at the French Theatre; and that he was truly sorry to hear that Aunt Xenia had caught cold. Powerful Alexander, who could twist iron rods with his hands, never thought, for a moment, that his frail son, gazing upon the tremendous bulk of his parent—observing, too, his unrestrained mannerisms, and his stern expression—should experience something akin to uneasiness, confusion, fear, or shyness. Nor did he know that it was for this reason that the heir to the throne retired, snail-like, into his shell of politeness which was as impersonal as it was complete.

The Czarevitch manifested the same reserved, impenetrable equanimity at all public appearances. Having been appointed Chairman of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Nicholas punctually attended the Committee meetings. He shook hands with each of the delegates in turn, ensconced himself in his chair, opened the meeting, and then kept silent for hours on end, inert and polite as ever. During all the years that he presided over this Committee, he never once assumed a definite position regarding the world-historical labours of the enterprise. And yet not one member of the Committee could justifiably claim he had ever noticed the slightest expression of boredom on the Czarevitch's features during all those meetings.

Nicholas evinced the same calm and courteous interest in all affairs of state in which his father permitted him to participate. Just once—

probably to the great gratification of the Czar—the Czarevitch displayed a spirit of youthful exuberance. This frivolous neglect of state business Nicholas himself describes in his diary as follows: "I presided at the State Council to-day. I simply ran away when the usefulness of Latin instruction in high schools was discussed. I thought I would die."

Alexander, who had no understanding for psychical complexes, saw only one method to make of his obviously inhibited son a worthy heir of Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible—the route via the officers' casino.

The hallowed rooms of an officers' casino of a Guard regiment attracted the very best Russia's aristocracy had to offer their Czar. The society of friendly young men of good manners and high-sounding names might prove helpful to the Grandduke. To be sure, Alexander III was no friend of the military. Even the best regiment of his Guards, according to the Czar, was beset with no small threat to the morals of the Czarevitch. The Guards were leading a frivolous life. Many of the officers were heavy drinkers; worse yet, some kept mistresses. The strait-laced Czar frowned on these love affairs. Whenever possible he dismissed officers, exiled granddukes, and demanded the resignation of generals who were so weak as to indulge man's lower nature.

As far as drinking was concerned, the Czar was less prejudiced. He considered drinking merely an expression of good old Russian ways; indeed, he himself liked to drink. Among the Guards, where the imperial aversion to erotic excesses was only too well known, drinking often assumed abominable, even morbid, manifestations. Once in a regiment stationed at Czarskoje Selo, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Czar's residence, officers drank to such an extent that they fell victim to a strange obsession. Their sodden brains were filled with animalistic pictures and conceptions; they seemed deprived of everything human. Primordial instincts awoke in them and clamoured for primordial expression. Apparently, the subconscious creature of prehistoric days took possession of their bodies. Like the victims of Circe, the officers of the Guard suddenly seemed to change into ferocious wolves. They tore off their uniforms and slunk about on all fours, their commander leading them down the deserted streets. They whined and barked and babbled in alcoholic frenzy until orderlies brought out pails of champagne to them. Another time, the colonel of a regiment of the Guards was found, very drunk and stark naked, on the roof of his house, where he sat baying at the moon.

Nevertheless, Alexander decided there was no other way to develop his son. After all, the Czarevitch knew nothing beyond the narrow, musty rooms of the forbidding Gatshina palace. The wide world, beginning beyond those walls, was a closed book to Nicholas. Perhaps the drill of military service and forming new friendships would endow the heir to the throne with a stronger spirit. Alexander carefully chose the most suitable regiment and then explained to his son that he was to be accepted into the comradely circle of the Life-Guard Hussars,

stationed at Czarskoje Selo. First there, and later in the Preobrazhensky Regiment—foremost among the Russian Guards—Nicholas advanced as far as colonel, a rank he was to retain to his death.

Thus, to a bewilderment almost amounting to fright, the shy Czarevitch found himself, one day, in the officers' casino at Czarskoje Selo, surrounded by gay faces. That the Grandduke-Czarevitch had become a member of the regiment was the highest honour the Czar could accord any unit of his Guards. The officers therefore strained every effort to prove themselves worthy of this indication of imperial grace.

To his amazement, Nicholas noticed that the new world, now open to him, attracted him strongly. Day after day he led his troops to the drilling ground. The resonant beat of the regimental march sounded stimulatingly in his ears; dipping his sword, he joyfully greeted the old regimental colours. It was then that he discovered that he was not merely the first in a long line of grandducual aspirants to the throne, but also a man of flesh and blood who shouted commands at the top of his voice and shook hands with comrades and who, of evenings, in the officers' casino, would discuss the service with men of equal station.

The officers' casino took him by storm, becoming the first great and lasting impression in the life of the future Czar. The spirit of splendid comradeship, the blind confidence in one another, the nonchalant hauteur with which misfortunes were met, made the officers' corps seem more like a distinguished English club than a regiment. To the day of his abdication—except for his life within the intimate family circle—Nicholas did not know any society superior to that which he found in the casino of one of his aristocratic regiments.

The entire behaviour of the Czarevitch changed noticeably. No longer was he so inhibited; his hearty laughter rang out in the palace as well as elsewhere. Time and again, he confessed in his diary: "Came home early in the morning." More and more often, the Czar was informed that the Grandduke-Czarevitch appeared pleased with military life and that his comrades liked him. True, now and then, his stern reaction to the frivolous adventures of certain young officers occasioned slight consternation among them—a fact which gratified the Czar greatly. To all appearances, respect for the seventh commandment was a quality which the slender Czarevitch had inherited from his huge father. It was this trait which, for some time, made Nicholas the subject of discussion among the aristocratic officers who deemed his squeamishness "rather ridiculous."

Now and then gossip would reach the Czarevitch to the effect that one of his comrades kept a mistress, whereupon he would do everything in his power to force the unfortunate officer to lead his love of the moment to the altar. In many instances, these mistresses were not exactly members of the St. Petersburg aristocracy, so that such marriages often necessitated the officer's resignation from the regiment. In cases of this kind, the Czarevitch assumed the economic responsibility for the young couple. Through his intervention, the bridegroom, by

order of the Czar, found a position within the bureaucracy. Consequently, at the time of Nicholas's ascension to the throne, there were governors and vice-governors galore, their more or less enforced marriages having been arranged by the heir to the throne.

It was in the summer of 1890 that the Czarevitch's squeamishness came to an abrupt end. That summer, his regiment was encamped at Krassnoje Selo for the great imperial manœuvres. Involving balls and regimental festivities, the conferring of titles and decorations, such a manœuvre was not only a military but also a social event.

The great official balls were opened by the Czar in person. Placing a powerful arm resolutely around the Czarina, Alexander would gracefully waltz through the ballroom. The smaller, more intimate affairs, arranged by the officers, always included a bevy of actresses and ballet dancers, young ladies of the St. Petersburg *demi-monde*, and attractive foreigners. The young Czarevitch, who showed himself to the world at large for the first time, was enthusiastically welcomed everywhere.

The manœuvre where the Czar, with a single sweep of his sword, commanded tens of thousand of his Guards, and the ensuing brilliant affairs, enlivened by the lilting measures of the waltz ; the impressive grandezza of the quadrille, and the spirited grace of the mazurka, swept the young Czarevitch off his feet. In a revealing flash, the indescribable pomp and glamour of imperial St. Petersburg seemed to unfold before his eyes in all its breath-taking and intoxicating beauty.

At one of these intimate balls, young Nicholas met the beautiful Polish girl, Mathilde Kshesinskaja, member of the Imperial Ballet. With the last notes of the waltz still ringing in his ears, Nicholas gazed admiringly into the girl's lovely dark eyes. He regarded her with a gravity clearly indicating that he was a grandduke of merely twenty, imbued with fear of the unknown and restrained by respect for the seventh commandment.

Neither the young dancer nor the officers misread that glance. At the next *souper*, Nicholas found himself seated beside Kshesinskaja. This happened again and again. Before the manœuvres had come to an end, it was reported to the Czar that the Grandduke had crossed that delicate line which separated the youth from the man. And beginning with that very day, Nicholas's diary repeatedly bears the entry : " Had an argument with Father on account of Kshesinskaja." With all the authority of a Czar and a father, Alexander III reiterated to his son what he had said to his frivolous father many years before when he himself was still the Czarevitch : He who is destined to wear the crown of the realm, and who is to receive the mystery of anointment, could not afford, before God and humanity, to keep a mistress.

To his father's astonishment, Nicholas displayed the characteristic obstinacy of a Romanov. He listened politely and attentively to the Czar's words and expressed his regret for grieving his imperial father—but there was no change whatever in his relations with Kshesinskaja. Amazed, Alexander discovered in the calm glances of his son the same bold resoluteness with which Peter had re-created the realm ; Paul had

exiled entire regiments from the drilling grounds to Siberia ; and Nicholas I had declared to his ministers : " I can do everything. The only thing I cannot do is to command my men to become pregnant."

For the time being, Alexander had to resign himself to this streak of Romanov boldness. But before long a scandalous development enabled him to bring upon the head of his son the unmitigated force of his imperial anger.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

A FOGGY, wintery St. Petersburg morning steeped in drab grey. The clock in the church steeple rang out the hour of six and the guard at the gate of the Gatschina Palace was changed. Two gigantic soldiers stood as if petrified at the entrance to the castle. Their simple souls were painfully impressed with the consciousness of their responsibility. Did it not devolve upon them to protect the Czar against the fog, against the void of St. Petersburg, and against the cold creeping up from the Gulf of Finland?

At a quarter-past six, hoof-beats echoed in the still air. The guards gazed about in startled surprise. Certainly it was most unusual for anyone to visit the Czar at such an early hour. At last, a sled drawn by three horses emerged from the fog. A liveried flunkey sprang from the driver's seat and opened the fur-lined door of the troika. The soldiers saluted. The caller was none other than Prince Bariatinsky, general *en suite*, and special friend of Czar Alexander III. Without acknowledging the salute of the soldiers, the Prince rushed into the palace.

In the antechamber, a well-trained lackey helped the Prince out of his greatcoat. The flunkey's face was as devoid of expression as a sheet of blank paper. Nothing in the servant's features betrayed that he observed the Prince's reddened eyes, his right eyebrow elevated in troubled despair and the crumpled ribbon of his many orders awry on his breast. Breathing heavily as he leaned on his stick and the arm of the lackey the elderly nobleman ascended the staircase of the Gatschina Palace. After every third step he paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow and stroke his Francis-Joseph beard, sighing in English: "My goodness!"

On the mezzanine, where the Czar's private suite was located, the aide-de-camp on duty received the General's command: "Announce me to His Majesty immediately."

The aide-de-camp looked at Prince Bariatinsky in surprise. "It is hardly possible that His Majesty is up yet, Your Serene Highness."

The old man raised a trembling hand, marked with blue veins, and, pointing towards the door, snarled: "Announce me immediately, immediately, I say!"

The aide-de-camp shivered. He noticed how the Prince's eyebrow shot upward, and thought the decrepit old man might easily crumble to dust at the very threshold of the Czar's bedchamber. And so he softly opened the door and vanished from view.

Half an hour later, Bariatintsky stamped into the Czar's study. Alexander sat behind the desk in full uniform. When Bariatintsky beheld his Emperor, he broke into wild sobbing. From his watery eyes flowed dirty little tears which disappeared in the luxuriant Francis-Joseph beard. Claspings his hands, and in a voice vibrant with emotion, the Prince exclaimed: "Your Majesty, a scandal, a terrible scandal . . . with a member of the dynasty involved!"

Alexander received the news scornfully. "No doubt Duke L—— has been drinking too much again."

"No, it is not that."

"What then?"

"Your Majesty," Bariatintsky stammered, "this time it is His Imperial Highness, the Czarevitch."

Then he sat down and sadly, but none the less emphatically, reported: "Last night His Imperial Highness, the Czarevitch, decided to accompany a number of officers of his regiment to the well-known Kubat Night Club. The Czarevitch ordered champagne, which was served time and again. At two o'clock this morning the owner of the resort drew his distinguished guests' attention to the fact that closing hour had approached. To this, His Imperial Highness, the Czarevitch, remarked that he was not at all interested in the respective city ordinances. Unfortunately, fifteen minutes later, the night club was raided by the police. One member of the party, a colonel of the Guards, emerged from the private dining-room and importuned the police officer in charge—naturally without mentioning the presence of the Czarevitch—to extend the closing time for once. However, the dutiful police officer refused the request, whereupon the colonel attempted to bribe him with a hundred roubles.

"The officer, incensed at this affront, assumed it his duty to make an example of the case and promptly conveyed the facts to His Excellency, the President of Police of the City of St. Petersburg, General von Wahl. The General immediately hastened to the night club. To his amazement, when he entered the private dining-room, he found His Imperial Highness, the Grandduke-Czarevitch, surrounded by officers of the Guard. His Imperial Highness, apparently greatly upset by the sudden appearance of Wahl, demanded what right the latter had to intrude upon his—the Czarevitch's—private life. Von Wahl replied that such interference was not only within his rights, but the duty he owed to his all-highest master who had entrusted him with maintaining quiet and order in his residential city. Thereupon, His Imperial Highness, the Czarevitch, seized a crystal bowl filled with caviare and covered the face and chest of His Excellency the President of Police, General von Wahl, with the aforementioned fish product. At the same time, His Imperial Highness remarked that von Wahl now presented the impression of a dyed-in-the-wool negro. It was not before I myself appeared on the scene that the affair was brought to an end."

Prince Bariatintsky was an old experienced bureaucrat. Whenever a situation appeared difficult he would resort to the language of official



L.N.I.

CZAR ALEXANDER III. FATHER OF NICHOLAS II



documents. While he delivered himself of his speech, the Czar remained seated, his hands folded, without stirring once. Then, after Bariatintsky had finished, the monarch asked calmly: "Who, besides the officers of the Guard, was present in the private dining-room?"

"Just a few ladies, Your Majesty."

"What sort of ladies?"

"The ballet dancer, Madame Kshesinskaja, for example."

"Is that so?" The undertone of that remark almost set the Prince choking. "Thank you, Bariatintsky," said the Czar, after a long silence, fraught with significance. "I appreciate your loyalty. Now go home and sleep well."

That day, at noon, the Czar received General von Wahl. The President of Police stood at attention and, in choppy sentences, reported: "Your Imperial Majesty, the all-highest uniform has been seriously insulted by His Imperial Highness, the Czarevitch. A public affront to the epaulets of a general . . . to the decorations Your Majesty graciously placed on my chest . . . not to mention that my face was smeared with caviar."

After the General had ended, the Czar said: "I must reprimand you, Wahl. The private life of the Czarevitch is, under no circumstances, any of your concern. Where would we land if every policeman pried into the life of members of the imperial family? You knew very well that your future Czar sat before you. However, I shall be lenient with you this time and leave you off with just a reprimand. And now you may go home."

At one o'clock, the Czar received the Czarevitch in a distant room of the palace. The conversation between the Czar and his son never came to light. Nevertheless, although all doors were tightly closed and the adjacent rooms empty, certain courtiers claimed they had heard thunderous bellowing roars issuing from that distant corner of the palace.

That evening, when father and son met at the imperial dinner table, not even the best judge of mankind could have discerned the slightest tell-tale reaction in their impenetrable features. Only after dinner had been served did the Czar mention, in an offhand manner, that the Czarevitch had now reached an age when, as future monarch, he should obtain a good glimpse of the world. For this reason, he had decided that the heir to the throne was to embark upon a cruise around the world in order to complete his education. Old Prince Bariatintsky was to be in charge of the trip. Besides, the Czarevitch was to be accompanied by his brother, Grandduke George, the Greek Prince Georgios, Prince Uchtomsky, and a few other officers. They would start shortly, aboard the armoured cruiser *Asov's Gedenken*, commanded by Admiral Lohmen.

A few weeks later, Nicholas boarded the iron-plated chamber which, for a few months, was to separate him from the Kubat Night Club and the dancer Kshesinskaja. Nicholas was not resentful. After the death of Alexander III he put General von Wahl in command of

his entourage and even made him Vice-Minister of the Interior, temporarily.

The Russian armoured-cruiser glided majestically through the billowing waves of the Mediterranean. The sun's rays beat upon its shiny steel plates. On the foremast flew the black and yellow imperial standard with the Romanov griffin. Two sailors stood guard over the flag. They received double rations of soap, fresh linen twice a week, and had been instructed how to comb their hair and keep their fingernails clean.

The holy-stoned deck of the armoured-cruiser was not unlike the shiny parquet floor of the White Hall in the Winter Palace. The parade uniforms of the crew drew attention to the fact that His Imperial Highness, the Grandduke-Czarevitch, was aboard. Below, in the captain's cabin, sat Admiral Lohmen and Prince Bariatintsky, arguing bitterly. In choice invectives they accused each other of recklessness, a deplorable lack of patriotism, and light-mindedness in general. Prince Bariatintsky insisted that four sailors should be detailed to stand guard over the imperial standard, whereas the Admiral considered two men to be sufficient. This difference in opinion had not even been settled when the voyage came to an end.

On the bridge, beside the vice-admiral on duty, stood the bald-headed, ugly, old Prince Uchtomsky. Perhaps in view of his bald pate His Majesty, the Czar, had endowed the Prince with the rank of official travel historian. The Prince was to write the story of the all-highest cruise around the world. Uchtomsky, bleary-eyed, stared into the dim distance, wearily awaiting an inspiration.

The deck chairs were occupied by the officers of the imperial entourage. The princes, Nicholas and George, were imbibing lemonade. The Greek Prince Georgios told of Odysseys who once sailed the same waters. The officers thought of their history lessons, of their Greek vocabulary, and of the nymph Calypso. They thought of the six months of boredom before them and shivered. No use to dwell upon the nymph Calypso, for during those six long months ahead of them not one female would be permitted to set foot on the cruiser. Naturally, this stringent ruling created an extremely difficult situation for a group of healthy young officers.

Grandduke George arose. His slim, almost girlish figure leaned against the railing. His cheeks, usually so pale as to be almost transparent, were rosy from the fresh sea air. He was his father's favourite and in intimate corners of St. Petersburg *salons* venerable dignitaries whispered that it was not entirely impossible that the gentle George might ascend the throne of the Romanovs instead of Nicholas. But now Grandduke George was as bored with this voyage as were all the officers of the entourage. The terrible monotony of sky, water, and decks had a soporific effect.

Somebody suggested emulating the English custom and arranging deck games. Nicholas promptly assented, his youthful body yearning

for exercise. Presently, a boisterous commotion ensued. Nicholas and the Greek Prince were racing each other. Grandduke George played hide-and-seek with two officers of the Guard. Prince Uchtomsky, attracted by the noise, looked upon the young people in disapproval as they laughed and shouted, disturbing the dignified atmosphere of this educational voyage.

Hearty laughter resounded as a circle was formed in the centre of which two officers wrestled. The prize was to be a glass of lemonade. Grandduke George rushed over to his brother. "Niki," he cried, "do you want to wrestle with me?"

Nicholas divested himself of his coat. Bent slightly forward, stretching his arms in the fashion of a ring athlete, he smiled at his brother. Uchtomsky looked on, not quite certain whether it was correct for two granddukes to interrupt imperially decreed boredom by a public ring performance.

George threw his arms around Nicholas. The bodies of the two brothers were knotted in a clinch. A blue vein stood out prominently on the forehead of the younger one. Beneath Nicholas's rosy skin his muscles tightened visibly. It was these muscles which decided George's fate—perhaps, even, the fate of the throne itself.

Step by step, a smile on his face, George retreated. Nicholas' eyes were bloodshot. Another second and George, according to the rules, would touch the ground with both shoulders. Just one more powerful jerk, and Nicholas let go of his brother. A scream of horror. The two brothers, in the heat of battle, had come too near the head of the companionway. His hands flung upward, George plunged down the steep staircase and landed on the iron plates of the lower deck. There he lay in a heap, motionless. Breathing belabouredly, stunned by the sudden accident, Nicholas gazed at the others in dazed helplessness. Officers rushed down the companionway.

A thin trickle of blood dripped from George's mouth. Carefully, the officers lifted up the unconscious Prince. For a fleeting moment their glances flashed across at Nicholas, who stood rooted to the spot. Bariatinsky, arriving upon the scene breathless, an alarmed expression on his ashen face, stared into the distended grey eyes of the heir to the throne.

The armoured-cruiser made for the nearest port. Obviously, George was in no condition to continue the trip. The internal injuries he had received were more serious than had been first assumed. He coughed uninterruptedly and blood stained his handkerchief. The fall had been too much for his frail body. A hidden, invisible disease became apparent now. Back in Russia, physicians, tapping his weak chest, had to admit that the Prince suffered from tuberculosis. In a few short years George was doomed to die in the picturesque Caucasian health resort, Abbas-Tuman.

In the muffled atmosphere of St. Petersburg *salons*, talk of a possible change in the succession to the throne ceased abruptly. Instead, in anxious whispers, the dignitaries spoke of the Grandduke-Czarevitch

who was spreading misfortune about him. Born on the day of the sufferer Job, he had inadvertently sounded his brother's death knell. Who knew but that he might bring even greater misfortune upon the Empire ?

This undercurrent of whispering was to accompany Nicholas throughout his entire life. Nobody dared refer to the tragedy by so much as a hint. However, from the strange reserved glances of his entourage, from the depressing silence that ensued whenever conversation touched the danger zone, it was easy enough to guess the suppressed thought : Brother's murderer.

The armoured-cruiser *Asov's Gedenken* continued its voyage. Neither Nicholas nor the officers surmised the tragic results of George's accident at that time. They actually envied the young Prince whose good fortune it now was to return to his beloved regiment, and to the enchanting atmosphere of St. Petersburg. For the other members of the party, the road back to their regiment led via Egypt, India, China and Japan.

It was in November that *Asov's Gedenken* anchored in the harbour of Alexandria. Nicholas, pale and quiet, was received with music, a deep genuflection from the Russian consuls, and a handshake from the Khedive.

The long journey failed to leave any lasting impression on the Czarevitch. With his usual indifference he jotted into his diary that Egypt was not very hot in the winter, that the pyramids were worth seeing, and that, at Luxor, a nude belly-dancer unquestionably had tried to seduce old Uchtomsky.

His diary was bare of all political observations. Only once Nicholas noted, with apparent dismay, that, in Delhi, he had met too many English soldiers in red uniforms. Egypt, India, China passed before the disinterested eyes of the Czarevitch like so many pictures painted on canvas. Mechanically, Nicholas shook innumerable hands, mounted camels, elephants and horses, or boarded railroad trains. He listened to the learned explanations of Uchtomsky, and then returned to the cruiser to relax in a deck chair and gaze contemplatively at that magical line on the far horizon which seemed to divide heaven and earth. Foreign countries held small interest for Nicholas ; after all his own country was vast enough.

In spring 1891 *Asov's Gedenken* entered Japanese waters. Again a round of hand-shaking, genuflections, and receptions ensued. The little Japanese smiled, all gracious charm, and Nicholas remarked that they appeared to him like monkeys pretending to be Europeans. It was the first time a European heir to the throne set foot on the soil of the Land of the Rising Sun. The Japanese did their utmost to offer their best to this prince from a foreign land.

Nicholas visited the celebrated Lake Biwa on April 13th. The Japanese guide told him of the old poets who sang of the celebrated lake ; of the noble Samurai who, suffering from *Weltschmerz*, had sought

to recapture the equanimity of their souls on the shores of the lake ; of lovers who found redemption from their terrestrial sufferings in the cool depths of the water. Nicholas gazed upon the Japanese dwarf trees mirrored in the water and the strange, fantastic landscape. It recalled the fairy-tale town, Kitish, to his mind, which is supposedly hidden somewhere in Siberia beneath the waves of the holy Baikal Lake.

The Japanese city Ozu, situated on the shores of Lake Biwa, takes pride in a celebrated and greatly venerated Buddha temple. After luncheon the exalted guests were the first Europeans in the entire world to visit this temple.

Even as Nicholas strode towards the Buddha temple, under the blistering rays of the Japanese sun, a cold wind whistled through the streets of St. Petersburg. Rain fell in torrents. At the bridge in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a long string of gilded carriages with liveried lackeys was lined up. The windows of the ministry blazed with light. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baron Giers, was giving a banquet for foreign diplomats.

Under-Secretary of the Ministry, Count Lambsdorff, did not attend the dinner. He worked in his office until eight o'clock. Then he slipped into his coat and descended the broad marble staircase. At the foot of it he recognized the wet, excited man rushing toward him to be Secretary of Mails and Communications, Director Bisak. "I must talk to the Minister immediately," cried the distraught Bisak. Informed that Baron Giers was at dinner, he clutched Lambsdorff's arm anxiously. The latter led the excited man into his study and Bisak slumped into a chair. "For Heaven's sake," he stammered, "can you tell me who a certain Bilandt in Tokio is?"

"My dear man," Lambsdorff said in surprise, "how should I know?"

"You must advise me immediately," Bisak implored.

Lambsdorff thumbed the international list of diplomats and ascertained that Bilandt was the Swedish-Danish minister to the Imperial Japanese court. "Good Lord," Bisak shouted in despair, "that means it's really serious. Just read this telegram which Bilandt sent to Copenhagen and Stockholm and which I intercepted officially."

He handed Lambsdorff a slip of paper. Lambsdorff's hands trembled as he read: "Russian Grandduke heir to throne wounded severely on head with cutlass of Japanese policeman in city Ozu near Lake Biwa. No details as yet." Lambsdorff looked concerned. So far, neither in the ministry nor at the telegraph office, was anything known about the incident.

At half-past nine, the banquet over, Lambsdorff informed Baron Giers. The minister ordered an inquiry to be dispatched to Japan immediately. While the telegraph wires between Russia and Japan carried messages back and forth, the two diplomats, profoundly shaken, maintained a gloomy silence. Only once Giers exclaimed: "What a terrible thing to happen! How can I dare to step before the Czar to-morrow morning?"

At one o'clock that night the Japanese ambassador appeared in

the ministry. Obviously embarrassed, he reported that the religious susceptibilities of a Japanese policeman had been offended by the appearance of a European in the Buddha temple and he therefore had attacked the Grandduke. Fortunately, the Greek Prince Georgios had jumped upon the attacker and knocked the weapon out of his hand. Thus the life of the young Czarevitch had been saved.

The next morning the Czar received the news with remarkable composure. At the moment no details were available. After agonizing hours of suspense, a telegram was received from the heir to the throne, addressed to the Czarina. It read: "Have been gravely insulted by a Japanese. My condition is excellent." The message greatly relieved the Czar, who concluded that since the insult appeared more important than the wound the injury could not be very dangerous. To be sure, to an imperial prince, an insult was at least as painful as a wound.

In his later relations with the Japanese, Nicholas never forgot the policeman of Ozu!

Towards noon another telegram arrived from Japan. The Government, assuring the Czar of its inexpressible regret and mortification, begged for all-highest forgiveness. In a marginal note on the telegram the Czar wrote: "Of course, we shall not require any other satisfaction." At the same time he telegraphed his ambassador in Tokio: "The further sojourn of my son in Japan seems inadvisable. If possible, it would be extremely desirable if the visit of some Japanese prince could be politely declined by St. Petersburg. Inform the Japanese Government that we are completely satisfied with the graciousness shown by the Emperor, the Empress, and all the Princes."

The head injury of the Czarevitch proved inconsequential; the powerful hand of Prince Georgios had interfered effectively. A few days after the attack Nicholas set foot on the Siberian shore of his realm. With fitting ceremony, the Czarevitch, as his first public act, laid the corner-stone for the great Trans-Siberian Railroad.

From there, the sojourn was continued by horse and carriage. Before the Czarevitch's eyes unfolded the endless Siberian steppes. There were thousands of kilometres of a green plain, void of humanity, wild and immeasurable. The far horizon was only occasionally studded with the bulbous golden cupolas of churches, resembling so many pyramids in a desert.

The whole of Siberia re-echoed with the ringing of church bells. The chimes of the farthest monastery reverberated through the primeval forest, reaching the ears of long-bearded Siberian *mushiks*, and even travelling across the border to mysterious Tibet.

Mongolian nomads, monks and lamas, aborigines, demon worshippers, magicians, and shepherds rushed towards the great highway to inhale the dust stirred up by the carriage of the future Czar. Wherever the grandducal carriage halted, eager crowds gathered. Monks and *mushiks* knelt in the dust, crossing themselves, and sweeping the Siberian soil with their long beards. Once, a Tibetan lama, a holy man of great renown, approached Nicholas.

The Czarevitch believed in holy men and miracle workers. The face of the wise lama was as yellow and dry as parchment. Nicholas permitted him to study the palm of his left hand. The oblique eyes of the Tibetan lama widened in terror. In broken Russian, he whispered : " From the funeral of a near male relative, Thou wilt go to Thine own wedding. Thou art in danger but Thou wilt escape, and if Thou completeth the fiftieth year of Thy life Thou wilt die quietly in Thy bed. I see much blood in the lines of Thy palm, therefore, be Thou aware that only a good man can be a happy man."

The soothsayer disappeared in the motley crowd. The troika proceeded on its way, the little bells attached to the horses' manes jingling merrily. Nicholas observed innumerable bent backs, one of which must belong to the lama. And so he waved a hand in their direction.

Born on the 18th of May, 1868, his life ended in Siberia on the 16th day of July, 1918, two months after his fiftieth birthday.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TRAGIC IDYLL

ALEXANDER III, chilled by the cold fogs from the Gulf of Finland, felt genuine affection for the southlands. The mighty monarch was proud and happy that snow-covered northern Russia had brought under its sway vast stretches drenched by a subtropical sun the year round. In the south of his realm, in the Crimea, where the Colossus Russia stares into the dim distance of the Black Sea, the Czar built a palace for himself. Every year the subtropical gardens of Castle Livadia re-echoed with the voices of the Czar's children. The park was crowded with the glittering uniforms of courtiers. Enchanted by the beauty of the southern sea, the Emperor would glance across the smooth waters which, on one shore, mirrored the square beard of the Czar and reflected Stamboul's ornate mosques on the other.

In 1891 the Czar left for Castle Livadia, following his usual custom. He stayed there until the middle of October and then returned to his capital city. Two behemothian engines drew the imperial special train through the plains. The Czar was impatient and so Minister of Transportation Poljet, member of the imperial entourage, instructed the engineer to drive the train as fast as possible. Although an excellent admiral in the Czar's navy, Poljet did not realize that the heavy train was in danger of being derailed every time it rounded a curve at excessive speed.

It was on the 30th of October, 1891, in the neighbourhood of the station Borki. At noon hour the imperial family assembled in the dining-car with the older members of the House of Romanov seated at table. While flunkies served dinner the Czar glanced down from the steep railroad embankment at the soldiers who, petrified with respect, presented arms as the train rushed by.

Suddenly there was a deafening report. The dining-car shivered. Plates clattered to the floor amidst shattered window panes; iron crunched and heavy doors crumbled. Enveloped in a cloud of dust the train hurtled down the steep embankment. The Czarina stumbled and fell. The furniture was smashed like a set of toys when the heavy wide iron wall of the railroad carriage folded up like cardboard. The sudden impact broke the steel couplings of the car. As the dining-car landed at the foot of the embankment, the roof crashed in.

Steel, brass, iron—all appurtenances of modern industry—apparently stood ready to crush the entire exalted house of the Czar under their heavy weight. In that terrifying moment the whole fate of a gigantic empire was at stake. At that spot, on a railroad track near Borki, it

appeared as if two antagonistic worlds fought each other, with the younger one, armed with modern machinery, bent upon destroying the stern dignity of the feudal dynasty.

It was then that Alexander III brought his enormous physical strength into play. Momentarily, the calm, austere giant was transformed into a hero. While everybody else, paralysed with fear, stared at the crumbling roof of the railroad carriage, the Czar jumped up, counteracting the united force of steel and iron with the great strength of his imperial shoulders. Like Atlas upholding the heavens, so Alexander, with his hands and shoulders, supported the roof of the buckling railroad coach.

For minutes the Czar fought this superhuman battle and remained victor. He had saved his family. Not one passenger in the diner, neither the Czarina nor her sons, suffered the least injury. When help finally came to relieve the Czar of his colossal burden, Alexander, accompanied by Nicholas and George, went to look after the wounded and to offer them a few words of encouragement.

With the speed of lightning, information spread of the miraculous escape of the Czar and his family. When Alexander returned to St. Petersburg, a few days after the catastrophe, he was received by a large crowd, among them enthusiastic university students and high school pupils. Their heads bared, their eyes shining joyously, they looked upon their Czar, and suddenly the unstinted old Russian love for Little Father Czar seemed to awaken anew in them. Alexander, who had always looked upon the young intelligentsia as the most dangerous enemy of his realm, was deeply touched. He felt that now, after ten years of his rule, the old bond between Czar and people, so tragically torn asunder on the 13th of March, 1881, had been tied anew at last.

However, the battle with the spirit of the Machine Age, which the Czar had fought at Borki, was to leave its mark. Notwithstanding annual prayers of thanks, henceforth to be offered by the Russian multitude on every anniversary of the railroad disaster, the Czar's strength declined steadily as an aftermath of the internal injuries he had suffered in the accident.

Alexander III constantly was losing weight now; it even became a strenuous task for him to walk down the rows of invited guests at large receptions. At gala dinners, imperial relatives observed with alarm how the face of the Czar was moist with perspiration.

Like all the Romanovs, Alexander III had little confidence in the wisdom of physicians. The life of the head of the Church, and of the Czar of All the Russias, rested solely and exclusively in the Hands of God and did not depend upon the deficient art of Court Medicus Hirsch. Rumours of the sudden decrepitude of the monarch needed no official confirmation. A mere glance was sufficient to realize that this once robust man was fighting a losing battle with a grave malady.

In view of the Czar's illness, Grandduke Michael, eldest uncle of Alexander III, visited the Emperor in 1892 to discuss an important

dynastic question with him. Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicholas was still unmarried. If Russia's ruler should pass away, a man would ascend the throne who, temporarily, would be unable to provide legitimate heirs. In Grandduke Michael's eyes, this possibility involved serious dangers for realm and dynasty.

Alexander III fully understood the problem and agreed that the Czarevitch must marry. An exemplary husband, the Czar left the choice of the future Czarina to his wife, Maria Feodorovna. A few days later, Nicholas, to his embarrassment and surprise, was informed that it was his parents' wish to see him married as soon as possible. At the same time the Czarina made it clear to him that Princess Helen of Orléans would be a suitable consort. Her father, Count of Paris, was pretender to the French crown.

To be sure the anxious Czarina, who had so carefully and critically considered all the available princesses of European courts, did not know that Nicholas, two years earlier, had jotted into his diary the brief sentence: "It is the dream of my heart to marry Alix H. some day." This Alix H. was Princess Alice of Hesse-Darmstadt and on the Rhine, cousin of Emperor William of Germany and granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England.

The Princess was fourteen years old when she entered the granite gate of the Winter Palace for the first time. All the glamour, the power, and the wealth of Russia revealed themselves to her in the intoxicating grandeur of a great Court ball. Among the crowd of gold-braided courtiers, bejewelled grandduchesses and beautiful ladies-in-waiting, the little Princess noticed the slender figure and large, dreamy grey eyes of a sixteen-year-old youth who, in time, would be the proud possessor of this palace, master of this brilliant Court, and ruler of this entire vast empire. That festive evening, Alix and Nicholas were inseparable. When, eventually, the young Princess returned to her homeland, there remained forever anchored in the heart of Nicholas the picture of a small blonde girl.

The young Princess was connected with Russia through her sister, Grandduchess Elizabeth, who was the wife of Sergius, favourite brother of Alexander III. The clever Grandduchess had observed the friendship between the two children, and it was at her initiative that a few years later Alix was invited for a six-weeks' stay with the family of the Czar at Peterhof.

This sojourn proved a deep disappointment to young Alix. While at home, in Hesse-Darmstadt, her family already regarded her as the future Czarina, and while Russian courtiers at first had received her with extremely devout genuflections, nevertheless she could not fail to notice that now the glances of the Czar and Czarina rested upon her with unmistakable dislike.

The imperial couple disapproved of everything about Princess Alix. She was German. She read poetry. She had a dreamy, almost affected manner of speaking of things divine. Last, but not least, she was the daughter of Grandduke Ludwig IV who, at the time his daughter made

every effort to gain the affection of the imperial couple, indulged in an outrageous flirtation with the wife of the Russian minister at the Darmstadt Court. This was sufficient to arouse the wrath of the straitlaced Czar against everything Hessian.

Of course, it did not take the experienced courtiers long to scent the imperial attitude toward Alix. Consequently, their own bows became stiffer, their glances cooler, their speeches more restrained. The Hessian Princess, who had come to Russia on an embarrassing quest for a husband, struck them as a ludicrous figure. Soon Alix discovered that the clique of haughty courtiers had given her the nickname of Hessian Fly. The significant glances, innuendoes, and gestures hurt the young girl of nineteen like the lashes of a Russian knout. To her, the imperial Court represented a world full of enemies, and to the end of her days she never fully recovered from the humiliation suffered at their hands. Later, as Czarina, she vainly sought to strike the right note in her contact with the courtiers. The shyness which induced her to withdraw from pomp and circumstance doubtless was a result of the bitter experiences she had had during those agonizing weeks in Peterhof.

Then, too, the love which the heir to the throne bore her did not seem to her too firmly rooted. Nicholas's weak character was indeed unable to cope with the parental will. When the Czarina proposed the French Princess as a consort for him, Nicholas did not answer in the negative. Instead, he timidly confided to his diary: "Two ways are open to me. I would like to choose one while Mother wants me to decide on the other. What am I going to do in the end?"

One year after her visit to Peterhof, Princess Alix came to Russia again, this time to visit her sister. Nicholas desired nothing so much as to drive out immediately to Iljinskoe village, where the Princess sojourned. However, when his mother interfered, he speedily gave in, and not even an entry in his diary shows that it pained him to renounce his impulse.

Once, when Queen Victoria, in the guarded language of the diplomat, inquired at the Court of the Czar whether one of the Russian grand-dukes was interested in her granddaughter, Alexander III replied, in unguarded and undiplomatic fashion, that the Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicholas still was a very young man and not sufficiently developed to contemplate marriage. He first was to serve in the army for some time. Besides, his interest in Alix was merely a boyish infatuation, sure to be forgotten before long.

Four years later, with the incipient illness of the Czar, the question of marriage emerged to the foreground once more. The Czarina's words became more pressing, the Czar's glances more questioning. Pictures of those who seemed suitable to wear the Romanov crown were shown to young Nicholas. Throughout it all, the Czarevitch remained so bored and so disinterested that the Czar concluded his son would never marry.

After all attempts to force a decision had failed, the Czar instructed

Grandduke Michael: "You talk to Niki. It will be easier for you than for me." Grandduke Michael, eldest of the Romanov family, regarded this order as a holy duty and hastened to obey. To his amazement, he heard from the lips of the reserved, shy Czarevitch that he desired nothing so much as marriage, but that he could find happiness only by the side of the blonde Hessian Princess.

In the shadow of approaching death, the Czar bowed to his son's will. He gave Nicholas his paternal blessings and, on the 2nd of April, 1894, the Czarevitch departed for Coburg. There, in the presence of Queen Victoria and Emperor William II, Alix's brother, Grandduke Ferdinand of Hesse, was to be wedded to the daughter of the Duke of Edinburgh and Saxe-Gotha. Officially, Nicholas was supposed to represent his father at these nuptials; unofficially, he was to become engaged to Princess Alix.

Quiet little Nicholas, who loved to ice skate and who used to stroll along the banks of the Neva River with his cousin Sandro, knew better than anyone had expected how to represent his father with befitting dignity. But as he suffered his foreign relatives to kiss his cheeks, as he listened to the music of a popular operetta and as—wearing Prussian uniform—he received the German Emperor at the station, his glance ever wandered to the pale and beautiful—if somewhat set—face of Alix.

Law and custom demanded that Nicholas should ask his future wife for her hand. His very soul shivered at the thought of baring his heart to his chosen bride. Veritably aflutter with expectation, Alix's relatives disregarded all prescribed etiquette and permitted the two to spend hours on end alone each day. On these occasions Nicholas lectured the young Princess on the superiority of the Greek-Catholic religion over the Anglican, picked flowers and drank tea with her and accompanied her on little walks in the park. His lips never could pronounce that short, magical formula which would make the young Princess his fiancée. The words simply froze on his lips. After one of these meetings, Nicholas confided to his diary: "My very soul is weary."

It took the efforts of the German Emperor to break the Czarevitch's spell of silent anguish. In the manner of a bold Hussar, he attacked Nicholas's psychical inhibitions and the onslaught succeeded. The then German Chancellor, Prince Bernhard von Bülow, reported on the affair as follows: "After Princess Alix and the Russian heir to the throne had met day after day—not without noticeable embarrassment—in the old Castle Ehrenburg, Emperor William, in his impulsive and aggressive manner, took the Czarevitch by the arm. He led Nicholas to his room, told him to buckle on his sword and don his fur cap. Then he pressed a few roses into his hand and said: 'And now go and propose to Alix.' The same evening the engagement was announced."

On the evening of the memorable 8th of April, 1894, Nicholas jotted into his diary: "Wonderful, unforgettable day of my life. Day of my engagement to my dear beloved Alix. At ten o'clock in the morning, she came to call on Aunt Mienchen and there we declared our love.

Dear God, what a mountain has finally fallen from my shoulders ! How happy Papa and Mama will be ! All day long I went about as if in a dream, and I really did not know what had happened to me. It seems unbelievable that I have a fiancée."

Thus was ushered in the family happiness of the most unhappy of all czars. This joy in his family never left him ; neither during revolutions and wars, nor at the time of his dethronement. It was still his on that dark day when, hand in hand with an aged, grey-haired Alix, he descended the steps to the cellar of the Ipatjev-House in Ekaterinburg to face the bullets of his murderers.

Two weeks after his engagement Nicholas left Coburg to receive the congratulations of his people in distant, cold St. Petersburg and the blessings of his dying father.

Great changes were occurring at the Court of St. Petersburg, with the Czar's condition growing visibly worse. Professor Sacharjin from Moscow and Professor Leyden from Berlin meanwhile had arrived at St. Petersburg only to agree that the Czar suffered from a hopeless form of nephritis.

Information about the serious illness of the monarch was kept secret. Only Alexander himself, his wife and a few members of his intimate entourage were completely informed about the Czar's actual condition. However, the others could not help but observe the tired appearance of the monarch, the ashen skin, the sunken eyes, looking at the world so sadly.

The Czarevitch, too, recognized his father's condition. Dark hints from high dignitaries, anxious glances from his mother, and the generally depressed silence of the palace, were convincing enough intimations warning him of imminent and tremendous changes.

But Nicholas refused to interpret these sad signs correctly. The young Czarevitch fought against assuming the burden which, with his father's last breath, inescapably would fall upon his own shoulders. He ignored his father's illness with the same equanimity with which, later, as ruler of his realm, he was to ignore wars, revolutions, and defeats.

Shortly after his return to Gatshina, Nicholas appeared at his stricken father's bedside. In calm and courteous tones, he begged permission to visit his fiancée in England. The tired giant regarded his son sadly. His voice sounding strange, he asked his son to be patient for a few days longer ; just now, it was so hard for him to speak.

A short time later an old friend of the monarch, Chief of the Political Police, Count Tsherevin, visited Nicholas. He explained to the heir to the throne that the time appeared most unpropitious for a trip to England.

"But I spoke to the physicians," Nicholas pointed out, "and they do not consider the Emperor seriously ill."

"Perhaps not yet," replied the General significantly, "but imagine if something happened during your absence !"

"I have been assured that nothing is liable to happen," the Czarevitch insisted stubbornly. "Nothing will change my plans. Even if the Czar is as sick as you say, I will have to leave. I cannot let Alix wait so long."

"I beg of you, please be patient a little longer," the General pleaded. "The situation is far too serious for Your Imperial Highness to contemplate a journey."

"Oh, you are just a pessimist," Nicholas cried angrily. "I have promised Princess Alix that I shall spend the month of July with her and I simply must keep my word. Besides, life here is so dreary these days that it will be an excellent idea to get away from it for a little while."

There was nothing else the General could say. In St. Petersburg's aristocratic circles, however, there were whisperings that a young man starting out in that way would never come to a happy end.

On the 3rd of June Nicholas boarded the *Polar Star* and left for England where he spent a few enjoyable weeks. Nothing intruded upon the happiness of the lovers, not even the anticipation of imminent events. It seemed to them as if the Czar's fatal illness, the difficult days they presently would have to face side by side, the vast country trembling with anxiety, all were events occurring on a far-distant planet.

Shortly before his departure, Alix jotted into Niki's diary: "*Sur cette page blanche, que ne puis-je y graver un seul mot: 'le bonheur.'*"

To Nicholas this love became an island of happiness, whose blessed peace must not be disturbed either by personal worries or the outrages of fortune. The enchanted isolation of these two lovers, amidst the most gigantic storm of modern times, lasted for twenty-four years. It comprises, perhaps, the strangest phenomenon in the enigmatic psychology of Czar Nicholas II.

The prelude to this idyll of twenty-four years' duration was concluded in the middle of July when Nicholas departed from England to repair to the Crimea with the imperial family. There, under the rays of the southern sun, Alexander spent the last weeks of his life, fighting a losing battle with his illness.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE JOURNEY OF DEATH

**A**N air of deep depression hovered over the realm of the Czar. The marble magnificence of Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg resounded from the deep bass voice of the Metropolitan. The gilt cupolas of the sixteen hundred churches of Moscow vibrated with the thunderous echoes of their choirs. When the iron-clad gates of old monasteries opened in the snow-covered steppes of Siberia, tall tapers were revealed burning before the stern icons of St. Nicholas and the picture of Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky. In the magic twilight of the churches merged the simple costumes of the *mushiks*, the colourful skirts of their womenfolk, the flowing gowns of the popes, the solemn mien of the monks, and the gala uniforms of officers and officials. In every monastery, cathedral, and chapel of the vast empire, amid incense and flickering candles, and whilst the devout were crossing themselves, there arose one great supplication "for the mightiest, most orthodox, most autocratic, most gracious Emperor and Czar, Alexander III Alexandrovitch."

Meanwhile, on the terrace of Livadia Castle, the stricken monarch waited motionlessly. He felt that the pious prayers of the millions of his subjects would remain unanswered. God's stern will had decreed an early end for him. Ministers flocked to Alexander's sick-bed; autocratic power entrusted to the Czar must not be permitted to lapse for a moment. The devout prayers and litanies were drowned out by the iron severity of the Czar's last ukases. Alexander worked incessantly. The autocratic spirit of his last commands was to point the way for his son.

As soon as the burden of ruling had been disposed of, Alexander wearily dragged himself down to the shore. But even there, alongside the blue sea, duties of representation would pursue him. Granddukes came to visit him; officers of the army stood at attention before him; seemingly endless delegations arrived.

His hollow cheeks and dull eyes denoting inexpressible fatigue, the Czar presided at the imperial dinner-table. With sad mien he observed the succession of delicacies, calculated to tempt him, but whose very appearance and taste revolted him. Only during the last few weeks of his life did Alexander III dare to insist upon the fulfilment of a desire he had harboured all along: dainty dishes were to disappear from his board. The Peasant-Czar would please his palate, at least during the last days of his terrestrial existence, with plain peasant fare. Despite objections first raised by the Chief Master of Ceremonies, the monarch's wish was complied with, and simple dishes, prepared by a peasant woman from the village, were set before the dying Czar.

When his condition grew graver Alexander III refused to permit physicians at his bedside. Father John of Kronstadt, known as a preacher and faith healer, rushed to the Crimea. Resorting to ecstatic prayers, religious raptures, and dark exorcisms, the pope wrestled with the angel of death for the soul of the Czar. Actually foaming at the mouth, he beat his breast and, choked with tears, he raised his distorted face to the skies. His inarticulate babbling filled the little Court chapel. He grasped the head of the Czar and breathed magical formulas in his ear. Mysterious, semi-heathenish peasant-Russia seemed personified in this saintly man. His hysterical prayers and transfigured face were more in keeping with the dark powers of a Siberian shaman than the pious dignity of a Christian cleric. This raving pope was the future Czar's first contact with the mystical and magical forces, destined to play such a large part in his later life.

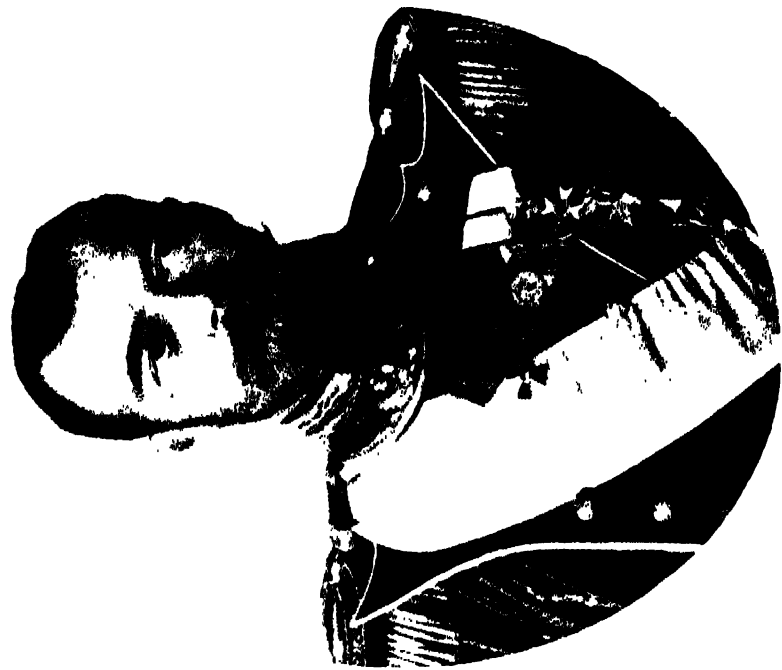
The pope's powers proved as unavailing as the canisters of oxygen with which the physicians sought to prolong the Czar's life. Two weeks before his death Alexander, with trembling hands, wrote a telegram to Alix of Hesse. The future Czarina was to rush to his bedside immediately.

That journey to the country of her fiancé assumed all the aspects of a nightmare for Alix. The bride-to-be of the Czarevitch was welcomed with the macabre sound of ecclesiastical litanies. In the excitement of the moment the Master of Ceremonies had forgotten to hold a special train ready at the border, and so the future Czarina had to travel through the country that was soon to be hers, like any other mortal. Through the windows of her compartment she noticed bewilderment on the faces of the officials and tears in the eyes of the womenfolk. She could not rid herself of the unhappy thought that all Russia had donned mourning to greet her.

Arrived in the Crimea, Alix found herself surrounded by sad and tear-stained faces. Only with the greatest exertion was it possible for the exhausted Czar to drag his broken body to a chair so that he might welcome his future daughter-in-law.

The incoherent screaming of Father John, his wild and excited demeanour, and the whole superstitious atmosphere which suddenly surrounded her, left a never-to-be-forgotten impression in the sensitive soul of the young Princess. Her fiancé's confused and awkward behaviour shook Alix to the very depths of her being. Five days after her arrival she sought to remind him of his position and dignity. "My dear boy," she wrote into his diary, "command the physicians to report to you first, each day, on the Czar's condition. You are the eldest son of your father. You are the one to answer all questions. Show your will and never permit others to forget who you are." In the shock of imminent death, Nicholas overlooked the pedantic tone of these admonitions.

Alexander III died on the 1st of November, 1894, at three o'clock in the afternoon, on the terrace of Livadia Castle. Father John of Kronstadt remained at his bedside until the last, mumbling pious



1914.

CZAR NICHOLAS II AND THE CZARINA





prayers into the Czar's ears. Grandduke Alexander Michailovitch, the only one who could describe the death of the monarch in detail, reported :

"It was on the 1st of November, 1894, that Niki and I stood on the terrace of beautiful Livadia Castle, holding canisters of oxygen in our hands. We remained with the Czar to the very last second. His end was like his life. As death approached, Alexander, ever scorning sonorous phrases and melodramatic effects, merely stammered a short prayer and then bade the Empress good-bye. . . . Alexander's death definitely decided Russia's fate. Everyone among the relatives, courtiers, physicians and servants, surrounding the Czar's death-bed, felt that, in him, Russia had lost that pillar which alone could protect her from being plunged into an abyss. The heir to the throne felt this more than anybody else. At that moment, for the first and last time in my life, I saw tears welling in his grey eyes. We embraced and cried on one another's shoulders. Niki could not collect his thoughts. He knew that he was Emperor now and the great burden of that responsibility simply crushed him. 'Sandro, what am I to do?' he pleaded pathetically. 'What is going to become of Russia? I am not yet prepared to be Czar. I don't even know how to talk to the ministers.' I tried to calm him. I enumerated all the persons on whom he could depend. But in my innermost soul I understood that his desperation was only too well founded and that we all faced catastrophe."

Dark clouds obscured the sky over Livadia on the evening of the 1st of November. During the night following the death of the Czar—the first of Nicholas's rule—a terrible storm raged around the palace. The old, wooden edifice shook. With howling winds and roaring waves, Nature greeted the new ruler.

For two weeks stormy weather followed the *cortège* of Alexander III. Wherever the funeral train arrived, in Kiev, Moscow, Tver, St. Petersburg, threatening clouds gathered in the heavens. His head bent sadly, the young Czar was forced to wade, mile after mile, through rain-drenched streets. Thus Nicholas II travelled from obsequies to obsequies.

Even the very hour when the mortal remains of Alexander III were interred rain fell in torrents. While the coffin was taken to the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul—where the dead Czar was to share his last abode with imprisoned terrorists—heavy fog enveloped the *cortège*. Presently snow flurries filled the air and darkness fell. For four hours the train of mourners marched slowly through the wet gloom of the streets of St. Petersburg.

The trip of the youthful Czar and his lovely fiancée was one long and solemn funeral procession. For the first time since the mysterious death of Alexander I, the body of a Czar was conveyed through the country. Crowds congregated at every station. On the faces of the populace were contradictory expressions: dutiful joy with which a new Czar should be greeted, and the equally dutiful exhibition of mourning which

was the dead Czar's due. Hand in hand with his young fiancée, Nicholas left the coach to attend funeral services at innumerable monasteries.

"We stopped at Borki and in Charkov where masses were read," Nicholas jotted into his diary. "In Moscow," he wrote, "we carried the coffin out of the train to the hearse. On the way to the Kremlin, we stopped ten times because litanies were to be sung in front of every church. The coffin finally was brought to the Cathedral of the Archangels. After the funeral services we prayed before the relics of the saints in Uspensky Cathedral."

During the entire painful trip, Alix was at the side of the young Czar. One day after the death of Alexander III she had been quietly baptized, according to the rites of the Orthodox Church, in the ancient chapel in Orianda. It was there, for the first time in her life, the German Princess found her Protestant soul steeped in an ocean of Russian mysticism. There, too, she was given the name of Alexandra Feodorovna.

Russia received the young Princess with the funeral dirge of the Metropolitans, with the stifling smoke of incense, arising from the masses of requiem, and with the solemn ceremonial of the interment of a czar. Flags at half-mast and the semi-darkness of old churches greeted Alix on every side.

No mundane stage manager could have arranged a sadder prologue for the young imperial couple. Hardly four weeks after the death of Alexander III, Alexandra Feodorovna walked to the altar in a white bridal gown. Her own wedding seemed to her but a continuation of those interminable funeral services.

The wedding ceremony was performed on the 26th of November, 1894, and on that day the new Czarina discarded mourning. At twelve o'clock she entered the Arabian Hall where the young Czar, in the uniform of the Hussars, awaited her. With slow step and solemn mien the participants in the ceremony approached the chapel. The heavy golden crowns were held over the heads of the imperial couple by Granddukes Michael, Sergius, and Cyril, and by the Greek Prince Georgios who, a few years before, had saved the life of the Czarevitch in the distant city of Ozu.

When Alexandra Feodorovna left the church, she was the legitimate consort of a ruler of one hundred and sixty million people, comprising one-sixth of the entire world, with palaces, estates, and jewels having no equal anywhere on earth. The vision which fourteen-year old Princess Alix had seen for the first time in the grandeur of a Court ball, as she gazed into the grey eyes of Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicholas, had matured into fulfilment at last.

At the threshold of Anitchkov Palace, the newlyweds, according to old Russian custom, were received by the Empress-Mother, Maria Feodorovna. She had done everything in her power to forestall this marriage but to no avail. Now, however, she bowed deeply as she presented a platter of salt and bread to the young couple.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE CENTURY

“**T**HE Russian Empire is ruled on the basis of indestructible laws, promulgated by a superior, absolute power.”

This eighty-seventh clause in the fundamental law of the Russian Empire was the only unchangeable law of Russia. The astute Count Speransky who, under Nicholas I, had worded this law, had attached special value to the expression “indestructible laws.” In this definition he saw the only, self-imposed limitation of imperial omnipotence. To be sure, it was the Emperor’s privilege to promulgate such laws as he saw fit, but these laws remained “indestructible.” The Emperor himself had to observe them as long as he did not change them. Accordingly, the Russian Empire was not a despotic, but rather an autocratic, monarchy, founded on law.

While in England Gladstone was overthrown by the Parliament for the last time ; while Lord Kitchener conquered the Sudan ; while William II dreamed of socialistic reforms and dismissed Bismarck ; while Felix Faure became President of the French Republic ; and while the United States had just celebrated the centenary of its constitution and Italy warred on the Ethiopian Empire, Russia was governed according to the indestructible principles of that autocratic formula.

The rule of a Czar encompassed 8,660,000 square miles and 160,000,000 inhabitants. Under this rule, the enormous expanse of territory and the innumerable peoples of Russia appeared as one united, gigantic power which could conquer everything, achieve everything, and decide everything in the world.

The Russian Empire had been at war, almost uninterruptedly, for three hundred years. Most of these wars terminated victoriously, and the more brilliant the victories of the Czar’s army the stronger, the mightier, and the more stable this country appeared before other nations. “Russia,” writes Witte, “is basically a military imperium. That alone assures Russia of her position in the eyes of foreign countries. It is not because of our culture that we have been granted a leading position. Our influence rests exclusively upon the strength of our fist.”

Within the borders of Russia, leading circles were imbued with the consciousness of military superiority. Protected by ten million bayonets, czarism not only could resist every exterior danger but could mould conditions in Europe and Asia as it pleased.

The power of the Czar, in addition to ruling Russia, maintained and nurtured monarchical order and God-imposed autocracy throughout

the entire world. When the Turkish sultan—oldest enemy of the Czar—was threatened by revolutionaries, Nicholas I did not hesitate to place the entire might of his imperial army at the disposal of his neighbour, in this way saving the sultan's throne. During the Hungarian revolution, the Czar considered it his duty to take a hand in rescuing from ruin the realm of Emperor Francis Joseph. Amity or enmity, hate or love, were forgotten when necessity demanded that the monarchical principle be upheld somewhere in the world. Within the boundaries of Russia, the God-imposed fealty to the Czar apparently dwelt indelibly in the hearts of his subjects. Simultaneously, at the command of the Czar, Russian troops, in the east and west, were called upon to preserve monarchical rule. Like a torch, Russia's autocracy burned brightly, shining above a chaotic Europe, shaken to its very foundation by the parliamentary trend of Western monarchies.

If, contrary to all expectations, the Czar should be assailed by doubts as to the stability of his own realm, the governing circles had prepared a whole arsenal of arguments to dispense imperial apprehensions. Russia was not only the mightiest, but also the greatest empire of the world. Embracing one-sixth of the globe, it possessed immeasurable riches and was geographically impregnable. The cities of this vast country flourished, new railroads criss-crossed the steppes, the national wealth increased, and the finances of the realm were in the best condition imaginable.

For centuries—indeed, since the days of John Kalitas—the country had grown in extent and power continually. If, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the young Czar had desired to enlarge his immeasurable empire, it would have been a trivial task to conquer China, Tibet, Afghanistan, and Persia. General Kuropatkin, the unlucky Field-Marshal in the Russo-Japanese War, reports in his memoirs that Nicholas II at one time actually considered that possibility.

Its strong internal power, increasing riches, rising national wealth, and geographical situation decided Russia's relations with foreign nations. Nicholas II ascended the throne of a much-feared country. China and Persia, eastern neighbours of Russia, conducted themselves like humble vassals. Even the British Empire, Russia's only important rival, for the first time in the course of its proud history, had to climb down under the pressure of Alexander III.

In 1885, when Anglophile Afghans trespassed upon Russian territory, they were pursued by Russian troops far into the interior of Afghanistan despite Great Britain's protests. The Czar answered all English objections by the mobilization of his Baltic squadrons—a gesture which sufficed to change an incipient war into a peaceful conference.

In Europe, too, Alexander III left his heir to the throne stable and secure conditions. The most outstanding world-historical changes in Alexander's foreign politics was his alliance with France, and his estrangement from Germany. Since the days of the Napoleonic wars, when Alexander I and Frederick William III had met, the Houses of

Hohenzollern and of Romanov had been united by ties of friendship and family. Only after Bismarck concluded an alliance with Russia's rival in the Balkans, Austria-Hungary, was this relationship disturbed. Subsequently, in 1890, when Germany cancelled her secret reassurance treaty with Russia, the bond of friendship between the two dynasties was definitely rent. Shortly after Count Shuvalov had been informed by Reich-Chancellor Caprivi of Germany's refusal to renew the treaty, the world at large was treated to the rare sight of Europe's only autocratic monarch fraternizing with Europe's only important republic.

It was on a foggy morning that a French fleet arrived at the harbour of Kronstadt. Alexander III boarded one of the armoured-cruisers. His reactionary courtiers thought the world was coming to an end when the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias arose and bared his head while listening to the "*Marseillaise*"—the very strains which, if intoned by subjects of the same Czar, would exile the transgressors to Siberia. During this world-historical scene, the policy of future decades was decided invisibly. Russia's alliance with France was to be a dependable safeguard against the Triple-Alliance of the Central Powers; it also was to furnish the basis for Germany's later encirclement. Alexander III knew well enough when to sacrifice his monarchistic principles to political expediency.

At the time of his ascension to the throne, Nicholas could look into the future calmly. No cloud, no shadow darkened the horizon of his omnipotence. Yet, beneath the serene surface of Russia, something threatening and uncanny seemed to be brewing. For a long time the realm of the Czar had been secretly seething with unrest; a poisoned atmosphere hovered over his enormous country. Beginning with the death of Peter II in 1730, until Alexander III, not one czar had died a natural death. In the memory of the people, there always was some bloody intrigue surrounding the demise of each monarch.

Peter III had been strangled by his wife. Thirty years later, the lovers of this woman strangled, in turn, his son—ill-fated Paul. Alexander, son of Paul, disappeared mysteriously and forever from his palace. Poison had put an end to the life of his brother, Nicholas I, and his heir, Alexander II, was torn to pieces by the bombs of terrorists. The steps leading to the throne of Russian omnipotence were incarnadined and grim spectres hovered amidst the marble magnificence of the palaces. It had required rivers of his peoples' blood for Peter the Great, as first emperor, to erect the edifice of Russian world power, and blood soon became the symbol of its fate. Beneath the apparent serenity of Russia, seemingly immersed in mystic slumber, boiled a secret revolt that was as demoniacal as it was intangible.

Since the days of Alexander I, when regiments of Russian Guards had been encamped on Paris boulevards, the face of the Empire had changed. From that European campaign, the officers of the Guard brought back with them as a trophy of victory the spirit of European revolution. As a stone that is dropped into water causes ever wider circles, so the spirit of the revolution gradually seized upon farther

strata of the Russian people. Spreading from the palaces of the princes, from the estates of the nobles, from the lecture halls of aristocratic universities, this unquenchable spirit eventually permeated the entire thin layer of urban, semi-*bourgeois* intelligentsia where it found a firm footing.

On the 14th of December, 1825, the day of the Decembrists' revolution, this spirit took possession of the streets of St. Petersburg. Then and there began the long row of heroes, criminals, scoundrels, and idealists who arose spectrally from out of the fog of St. Petersburg's quarters. The ideal of the French Revolution, draped in the barbaric vestment of Russian nihilism, inspired the upper class of St. Petersburg's youth. However, neither the touching heroism of St. Petersburg's countesses, nor the despicable crimes of half-demented nihilists, created any profound impression on the Russian people. The heroic contempt for death displayed by the revolutionaries, and the peasant customs they affected in order to establish intimate contact with the masses, failed to grip the souls of the Russian people to any marked degree. When the nihilists succeeded in assassinating a czar in a public street, for the first time in Russian history, the reaction of the peasantry was a mysterious silence which neither could be interpreted as sympathy for the murdered nor as admiration for his murderers.

Foreign observers regarded St. Petersburg's revolutionaries as the first sign that decline threatened the Empire. To them Russia became a colossus with clay feet, eventually destined to be overthrown by the power of European revolutionary ideology.

Alexander III's entire life proved the falsity of this assumption. Under the mighty fist of that ruler, revolutionaries disappeared even as the devil flees before the sign of the cross. The powerful word of an energetic, purposeful man—albeit none too wise—was sufficient to exorcise the demoniacal spook. Foreigners observed, to their surprise, that the Russian Empire, whose imminent end they had prophesied so confidently, had annihilated its opponents with one terrific blow.

England's evident complaisance, the eager offer of an alliance on the part of France, a loan readily placed in Germany—these were Europe's acknowledgments of the Czar's strong measures. Obviously, all conspiracies and murders of the nihilists did not make so much as a dent in the top layer of Russia's seething masses. As for the stability of the monarchy, revolutionary victories or defeats appeared as inconsequential as the floods along the Neva River for the peasants of the Volga lowlands. The only serious danger threatening czardom—eventually bringing about its decline—lay in an entirely different direction. That danger was embodied in the Russian peasant.

The enormous expanse of Russia's plains is Nature's gift to the peasant. Agriculture is the sole occupation which this vast land permits. Industry and commerce always were condemned to insufficient development. Russia's unfortunate geo-political situation rested upon the enormous empire like a curse of the Almighty.

Russia's mighty rivers flow through a majestic expanse, nearly devoid of humanity. Their waves billow lazily between wide banks ; along their shores, one hears the monotonous sing-song of haulers, tugging at tow-ropes. Cattle slake their thirst in the waters of these rivers, and the fierce Tatar, armed with bow and arrow, stares, slit-eyed across the endless plains through which the rivers roll their waters.

In Europe and Asia, busy merchant vessels travel along the gigantic rivers. Towns and villages spring up on their banks. Like a golden vein, the river threads its way through the country, distributing wealth in its course and, amid peace and prosperity, cities grow ever larger.

In the Volga, Russia possesses the mightiest river in Europe ; 2300 miles long, it surpasses the Rhine by 1600 miles. The three mightiest rivers in Asia, Ob, Yenisei, and Lena, are each almost as long as the Yangtse with its 3100 miles, and none of them ever leaves the borders of Russia.

Yet Russian rivers never developed into important arteries of mercantile wealth. The direction of the beds which these bodies of water have dug for themselves, since time immemorial, is Russia's misfortune. The gigantic Volga empties into the Caspian Sea, which has no connection with the open sea. Ob, Yenisei, and Lena, carry their cold waves towards the Arctic Ocean, which is frozen over for three-fourths of each year.

The world's cheapest means of transportation—shipping by water—thus excluded from Russia's economy, the wealth of the country lay fallow, and the inhabitants busied themselves with agriculture as the only gainful occupation of the plains. When Russia's industrial workers numbered 2,900,000, not less than 96,800,000 subjects of the Czar were peasants, with 88 per cent of all Russian exports consisting of agricultural products. Consequently, the welfare, contentment and comfort of the peasant were of infinitely greater importance to czarism than the revolutionary speeches of a few hundred students and intellectuals in St. Petersburg.

In past centuries Russia's peasants had been serfs of noble landowners. Alexander II realized their age-old dream for liberation. On the 3rd of March, 1861, the Czar promulgated his famous ukase which terminated serfage. With this manifesto, thralldom was abolished forever within the borders of Russia.

The peasants, until then property of their masters, naturally possessed no land of their own. Therefore, it was incumbent upon that Government which had granted them their freedom to provide also for the material comfort of the liberated peasants. Official Russia formerly had dealt with the *mushiks* only through the mediation of the noble landowners ; now it faced a new task in helpless embarrassment.

To be sure, the Czar expropriated, for the peasants' benefit, some of the estates owned by the nobles. The distribution of this land, however, encountered wellnigh insurmountable obstacles. Since it

was of utmost importance to define, without delay, the new status of the liberated peasantry, necessary reforms had to be enacted with lightning-like speed. The lack of suitable governmental agencies, officials, and surveyors, made it practically impossible to issue deeds of grant to millions of new property owners, distributed over millions of square miles. Besides, the police were unable to maintain law and order in all those villages which, in the past, had been subject to the will of the estate owner exclusively.

During this chaotic period of reformation the Government besought the services of a Prussian official, Baron August von Haxthausen. He had travelled throughout Russia extensively and, in his writings, had elaborated upon the systems of *obshchshina*, or *mir*, which he had observed in distant parts of the Empire. According to this system acreage was not deeded to an individual peasant, but to whole communities, thus becoming the common property of all members of the municipality. In turn, it devolved upon the communes to redistribute this land among the peasants from time to time. Essentially, however, the land remained the property of the *mir*, so that a peasant would plough one field to-day and another to-morrow, without ever feeling indigenous to any specific piece of ground. The *mir* also exerted police functions. By decision of the communal council, members of the community could be punished and even excluded from the common property, or restrained from leaving the district.

On the 14th of December, 1893, Alexander III decreed that all land apportioned to the liberated peasants was unsaleable. Moreover, communities were to forbid peasants to leave their respective municipalities, unless they could offer extremely pertinent reasons. The *mushik's* liberty was almost as limited as during the days of feudalism. On certain occasions the *mir* would force peasants to remain in their huts after ten o'clock at night. Besides, a *mushik* was allowed to leave the community only if he restored to it, without demand for reimbursement, all his cattle as well as his share in the communal land.

This strange system—half-medieval, half-socialistic—arising from the awkwardness of the commonwealth, eventually became an integral part of Russian world concept. Since the taxes imposed upon the peasant's land were very low, with only thirteen copecks for the deciatine, to the outsider this system not only seemed practical but very humane. Venerable philosophers of Slavophile tendency declared the *obshchshina* to be the agrarian personification of the Russian soul. Aksakov and Chomiakov insisted that this system realized the unconscious dreams of the *mushik*. However, the learned socialists with Western tendencies regarded communal exploitation of the land as the beginning of a socialistic order whose fructifying warmth eventually would develop other blossoms on the tree of Russian life.

The Slavophiles as well as the socialists obviously overlooked the fact that, by the very nature of this system, the peasant, formerly the serf of a noble landowner, had now been changed into the serf of the community and the police. Instead of being subjected to the arbitrary will

of a single person, the peasant now was subject to the will and whims of many. Besides, the land had been apportioned in such small parcels that, with an increasing population, confined to a definitely limited space, poverty and starvation appeared inevitable.

At the same time when 79 per cent of Russia's agricultural export was produced by only seven hundred aristocratic families, spread over twenty million deciatines in Central Russia, peasants in these same Central Russian provinces starved on their meagre soil. Of course, there was no real scarcity of land in this vastest of all countries of the world. While in western Europe 70 per cent of available land was under tillage, only 4 per cent of the Czar's domain was under the plough. Nevertheless, any attempt of the peasants to colonize the fertile and depopulated eastern territories was quickly and completely thwarted by the landed gentry. The nobles were afraid that if the peasants should emigrate to Siberia or Turkestan the subsequent shortage of workers would raise wages in Central Russia.

It was the system of the *obshtshina*, and the rigid restraint imposed on the peasant, which eventually resulted in indescribable impoverishment among the people. The low purchasing power of the Russian masses was best reflected by Russia's trade balance. Although Russia had 163 million inhabitants, spread over 8,600,000 square miles, her import and export equalled only that of Belgium, which had merely 7 million people crowded into 11,373 square miles. The average annual income of a Russian, in pre-war days, amounted to 53 roubles as compared to the 233 roubles of a Frenchman, the 273 of a Briton, and the 345 of an American. In 1910, at the same time that the *per capita* savings of a Russian was 16 roubles, the Frenchman had put by 96 roubles, the Englishman 106, and the German 143.

Despite the fact that the budget of the Empire rose incessantly—finally reaching high into the billions—*per capita* credit for the Russian peasant, in 1905, amounted only to five copecks. During the same period, agricultural credits in France amounted to 28 roubles, in Germany to 35, and in America to as high as 60 roubles per head. Naturally, the low purchasing power of the populace, combined with the lowest taxes in all the world, necessitated a steady rise of national loans. At the time when the *per capita* debt burden amounted to a mere five copecks in the United States, every Russian was indebted to the extent of 2.8 roubles. True enough, the finances of Russia were in good order, making punctual amortization of the debt possible. Nevertheless, the very fact that enormous debts had to be contracted in foreign countries furnished striking evidence of the surprising lack of capital in Russia's internal money markets.

The low income of the population cannot be more drastically illustrated than by the fact that a deciatine of timberland in Siberia yielded a profit of only one copeck, while the same deciatine brought 29 roubles in Germany and 36 in France.

After the railroads had been developed, the enormous natural riches of Russia demanded an ever-increasing expansion of her economics,

especially as the abolition of serfdom had transformed Russia into a private-capitalistic country. Towards the end of the reign of Alexander III, corporative enterprises in Russia had reached fifteen hundred in number, boasting a capital of three and a half billion gold roubles. In general, however, intensive industrial development remained limited because it was founded on the system of the barbaric, feudal-socialistic *obshtshina* under which the masses of the people remained poverty-stricken.

The key that would open the gate of Russian wealth and, at the same time, the door to political security, was the solution of the peasant question: the successful metamorphosis of millions of pauperized serfs of a communal collectivism into comfortable, loyal landowners. For fully thirty-five years, Russian peasantry awaited the magic word of the Czar which would abolish the *mir*. The peasants had served their monarchs with devoted fealty for more than a thousand years. They had conquered one-sixth of the entire globe for their czars. The hundreds of foreign nations that had been subjected to Russia's will ultimately constituted 40 per cent of the Russian populace. In the service of their czars, the peasants had built cities and erected palaces, paid taxes and shed their blood in innumerable wars.

In the course of centuries, czardom, recognizing the usefulness of its subjects, evinced marked solicitude for the weal of the peasant. Vassili III liberated the peasants from the Tataric yoke; Ivan IV gave the provinces antonomous government, and Alexander II abolished serfage. The stern ukases of Alexander III, however, changed the peasantry into children once more unable to exert their own will. Moreover, these children were no longer provided for by their parents, but, on the contrary, had to support their elders.

The peasants endured this status for thirty-five years and the longer they waited the more threatening became their silence. Their sullen resentment was not directed against czardom so much as against a stupid, temporary expedient, raised to a world conception for no other reason than that it had been the easiest thing to do. Those of clear political vision could not fail to interpret from unmistakable—albeit hardly noticeable—signs that behind this silence, pregnant with meaning, lurked fearful developments.

When Grandduke Vladimir travelled through the Volga region during the 'eighties of the last century, a significant incident had occurred. In Samara a hundred-year-old peasant woman was brought before him. The centenarian, for whom there was no difference between a grandduke and the Czar himself, knelt at the feet of Vladimir, covered his shoes with kisses, and cried in exultation.

"Why are you crying, little mother?" the Grandduke asked.

"What else should I do?" sobbed the old woman. "This is the second time now that God has permitted me to look upon a czar."

"Who, pray, was the first one?"

"Our Little Father, our benefactor, the mighty Pugatshov."

Vladimir, who had wisdom and understanding, immediately perceived

the deep implication in the old woman's statement. He knew that the peasants along the Volga looked upon the bandit leader Pugatshov as upon a genuine czar. It had been Pugatshov who had promised to distribute land among the peasants and, eventually, he had paid for it with his life. Because of Vladimir's genuine interest in the solution of the peasant problem, it remained the topic of general discussion in the *salons* and governmental offices of the capital throughout the reign of Nicholas II.

It was the peasants alone, and not the revolutionaries, not the foreign countries, not the industrial workers, nor yet the intellectuals who constituted the real danger to czarist rule. For the moment, however, the *mushik* still displayed devout loyalty to Little Father Czar, even though he was filled with bitter hatred for his laws.

The rule of Nicholas II would determine whether the silence of the masses would be aroused into jubilant acclaim, or into barbaric and brutal revolt.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CROSS AND CROWN

**F**OR two full years the old Kremlin city had awaited the celebration of the holy coronation of Nicholas II. Now at last, on his twenty-eighth birthday, he arrived in Moscow, wearing the simple, dark green coat of a colonel of the Preobrazhensky Guards. A young man with blond hair, closely trimmed, pointed beard, a physique at once frail and elegant, and long-lashed eyes of an odd shape, the new Czar appeared before the dignitaries representing the Church and estates of his realm. They assembled in the reception pavilion, adjacent to the railway station, which had been especially erected in old-Russian architecture for this great day.

The old, somnolent Asiatic city suddenly became alive, bedecking itself with festive raiment. The polished gold of innumerable bulbous church cupolas gleamed 'neath the sun's hot rays ; bright red carpeting enlivened the dingy narrow streets and garlands of flowers extended from window to window. A multitude, large beyond counting, had gathered in front of the reception pavilion.

As the young Czar mounted his dapple-grey steed at the railway depot, sixteen thousand church bells rang out in greeting to the young ruler ; louder and clearer than all the other chimes sounded that of Ivan Veliky, the ancient giant bell.

Attended by great ceremony, the Czar rode to the old Petrovsky Palace, his face aglow with gracious benevolence. The people of Moscow sank to their knees, the resonant measures of the national hymn swelling in grand unison. It was the first time the new Czar showed himself in festive celebration within the walls of the old city—scene of the Romanov's rise to glory.

Ahead of Nicholas II, winding through the narrow streets, stretched the ancient road of the czars. Once Ivan the Terrible had travelled along here and the long beards of the boyars had swept the dust before the hoofs of his horse. His face disfigured with fury, the Great Peter had passed these very churches. With his own imperial hands he had decapitated the rebellious Strelitzes in old Kremlin Square. Time was when blood dripped from the high boots of an enraged czar ; now, blood-red carpets were spread for the feet of another ruler, Nicholas II Alexandrovitch, the thirteenth of the Romanovs. Before him, in abject veneration, bowed the descendants of those Strelitzes, boyars and popes who once had erected the old city and studded it with golden cupolas in the midst of the icy Russian steppes.

The people of Moscow observed the grey eyes shining with refulgent joy in the calm and somewhat pale face of the Czar, and his slim hands

as they held the reins of his dapple-grey steed. Looking upon his narrow, aristocratic face, an inarticulate, wild love awoke in the multitude for former, more robust, czars who had been increasers of the Empire, protectors, and judges all in one.

The Czarina, garbed in white, a radiant smile lighting up her serious features, resembled, in her blondeness, the old frescoes of which Moscow churches abound.

Slowly the exalted couple threaded their way through the throngs. The crowded streets, the very houses and churches, seemed transformed into one happy and vibrant living being, paying homage to this imperial pair. From the decorated windows of every house, office, and store, exultant faces beamed upon their ruler. On this one day Moscow forgot the mercantile frugality inherited from its forebears. A business concern of medium size whose windows the Czar was to pass, spent twenty-five thousand roubles on decorations designed to please the imperial eye. A rich merchant paid forty thousand roubles for the privilege of gazing upon the Czar from the show window of a confectionery.

The dark clouds, the biting wind, and the downpour of rain which greeted the new Czar, proved ineffective in dispersing the swarming crowds. Fairly bursting with irrepressible curiosity, the people accompanied the young monarch and his consort to the very gates of the palace.

On the evening of the imperial entry the gilded carriages of the guests thronged the square in front of the palace. Courtiers, ministers, princes of all the dynasties throughout the world entered the Czar's mighty mansion. By nine o'clock that evening no less than eight thousand festively gilded coaches were assembled in the vicinity of the imperial palace.

In the great hall of the palace the Czar received the congratulations of the world. The church bells had ceased ringing meanwhile, but now hundreds of thousands of coloured bulbs and Chinese lanterns illuminated the darkness of the Kremlin city like so many gleaming gems. Broad beams of light flooded the golden cupolas of the churches; the roofs of the houses were steeped in multi-coloured hues. The whole city seemed to delight in this blinding, festive illumination. Garlands of lights were strung from one house to the next, and their bright reflection tinted the drab, threatening Moscow sky.

While the frail young ruler, standing at the window of his palace, gazed upon the sea of lights, flocks of innumerable crows and jackdaws blotted the sky like a dark cloud. The bright illumination blinded the birds, at the same time attracting them irresistibly. Like vultures pouncing upon carrion, the crows and jackdaws swooped down upon the gay, glittering bulbs strung along the roofs of Moscow. In the dazzling glare of the multi-coloured rays they resembled, with their widespread dark wings and their sharp, greedy beaks, apocalyptic messengers of the nether world, dispatched to disturb the celebration of the Orthodox Czar.

Presently the clatter of broken glass was heard. The sharp beaks of the birds were severing electric wires on the roofs. With frightened, blanched faces the multitude gazed upon the havoc wrought by these marauding birds. One after another the coloured lights flickered out and, even as the inhabitants of Moscow mumbled words of apprehension in one another's ears, the dark birds disappeared into the gloomy sky hanging heavily over the city.

On the morrow, when the first rays of the sun reddened the leaden sky, and as the chimes of the church bells reverberated throughout the city, a corps of agile workers mounted the roofs of Moscow. By nine o'clock, when the Czar left the palace and seventy-one shots were fired to announce his coming, the last traces of the nocturnal visit had been removed.

In the Kremlin, on the broad threshold of the Alexander Palace, the representatives of the guilds bowed before the Czar. On heavy silver platters, they presented bread and salt to their ruler. With his soft, slender fingers, Nicholas touched the symbolic gifts. Surrounded by granddukes and dignitaries, he entered the Alexander Palace. The empty, forbidding rooms exuded the spirit of past centuries.

In the great hall venerable courtiers spread out the enormous flag of the Empire. It covered half the hall and was adorned with heraldic beasts, griffins, lions and eagles. Armorial bearings of different parts of the Empire pictured the achievements of czars long since dead. There was the double-headed eagle which, once upon a time, Sophie Paleolog had brought to Vassili III as her only dowry from Byzantium. A small boat topped with a crown in a blue field told of the bold cossack chieftain, Yermak, who once had laid the whole of Siberia at the feet of the cruel Ivan. The white and red escutcheon next to it signified the rebellious hetman, Bogdan Chmielnicki, who had humbly placed in the hands of Czar Alexius the Ukraine together with the host of the cossacks. As the number of the czars increased, so grew the number of the escutcheons and heraldic beasts in the great flag of the Empire.

Mutely Nicholas II stared at the symbols of his glorious forbears. Next to the coat of arms of the Ukraine, he saw the pious Byzantine cross above the Asiatic crescent. This cross had been erected by the brilliant Prince Potemkin when he presented the sun-drenched Crimea to the beautiful Catherine as a gift of love. Beside the cross, astride a foam-covered steed, lance in hand, rode Holy George, the dragon-slaying patron-saint of Georgia. It was Alexander I, victor over Napoleon, who had extended his protecting hand over the land of the dragon-slayer.

The eyes of the Czar widened. In the rustling of the old flag he sensed the heart-beat of his Empire. The many czars, who in the course of time had assembled these symbols, now seemed to look down upon the heir expectantly from the walls of the hall.

Nicholas touched the flagstaff. In loud, calm and serious accents, he pronounced the oath of the czars: "Immaculately, I receive this flag, and immaculately I shall pass it on to my heirs." With the courtiers

folding the flag, the first act of the ceremony had come to an end.

Czar and Czarina spent six days in prayer and pious contemplation in the old palace of the czars. The Czar went from cathedral to cathedral in ecclesiastical processions. In the mystic gloom of the churches he kissed the remains of saints and the coffins of his forebears. The great square, between the campanile of Ivan Veliky and the cathedral of the Archangel Michael, overflowed with guests. Church choirs sang in the Kremlin.

Only towards evening Czar and Czarina found a few moments for themselves. But even then their time was encroached upon by preparations for the coronation. While the crown of the Czar was an heirloom of the House of the Romanovs, a new tiara had to be fashioned for each Czarina. The finest jewellers in St. Petersburg worked nine full months on this headdress. Diamonds, two thousand in number, and each absolutely flawless, were set into the gold of the crown. The Czarina herself looked upon the ornament with superstitious dread. She feared her soft hair would be unable to carry such a heavy burden, and was apprehensive lest the precious crown tumble from her head—an ill-omen indeed !

Although the Czarina's fears were unrealized that day, the date for the coronation proved an unfortunate choice. The Court chamberlains, the high dignitaries of the Church, the masters of ceremonies, and the Metropolitan had set the coronation of the monarch for the seventh day after his birthday, not realizing that it would fall on the 13th of the month, according to the Russian calendar. Since the day of the coronation had been decided months in advance, it could not be postponed. In St. Petersburg, in Moscow, in the distant monasteries of Siberia, and on the doorsills of little village churches, superstitious people commented in awesome whispers that the thirteenth of the Romanovs was to place the crown of the Empire on his head on the 13th day of the month.

Nicholas himself did not ponder on the coincident. The day on which he, according to the old words of the Church, was to be anointed "Bishop of All Things Secular" surely could not be anything but fortuitous for him !

Early that day the whole city resounded with the magnificent carillon of the bells of Uspensky Cathedral. At eight o'clock in the morning the participants in the coronation procession assembled in the impressive edifice. Sombre candlelight shone upon the precious stones covering entire walls of the cathedral. A heavy purple canopy was spread over the throne. Granddukes, attired in the full regalia of the Order of St. Andrew, surrounded the brocade-covered rostrum on which the Czar was to receive the crown. The strict ritual of the Byzantine coronation, laid down fifteen hundred years before in the Book Epinagog, unfolded in all its gorgeous splendour.

At a quarter to ten heralds announced the approach of the imperial couple. While the walls of the cathedral reverberated with the pious

chant of the church choir, the oldest dignitaries of the realm slowly marched into the edifice, carrying the insignia of the Empire. On a velvet cushion rested the great imperial crown. Resembling a mound of myrtle, fashioned from gems, the court jeweller of Catherine the Great had wrought it in the year 1762. The Byzantine cross of the crown consisted of five enormous diamonds, held together by an unpolished ruby. The head-band of the crown boasted twenty of the largest diamonds in the world, while eleven big diamonds supported the cross ; each of the four circlets on either side of the crown was embellished with thirty-eight roseate pearls. A second dignitary carried the imperial tiara—dating back to Alexander I—followed by others bearing the jewelled insignia of the realm. On the velvet cushions they bore gleamed the sword of the Empire, the orb of the Empire, the imperial cloak, the golden sceptre, and the chain of the Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew.

Behind the sparkling sea of precious stones appeared the Czar, frail and wan, garbed in the simple, unadorned coat of a colonel, the only order gleaming on his chest being that of sainted Prince Alexander Nevsky. As the Czar slowly approached the canopy the audience stood stiffly at attention. To the right of the canopy, on a dainty, finely carved throne dating back to the days of Czar Alexius Michailovitch, the Empress-Mother was ensconced. She leaned against the back-rest which was flanked by two carved Byzantine angels, while the hassock on which her feet rested was supported by four wooden elephants. Pale of face and immovable, she seemed more like a statue than a human being.

Accompanied by a throng of venerable hierarchs, Czar and Czarina ascended the fifteen steps to the throne. The ringing of the bells and the chant of the choir subsided, and the festive mystery of the coronation began in the ancient cathedral illuminated by the eerie light of tall candles.

Standing beneath the heavy purple canopy, the Czar now became part of the super-mundane glamour of the church. With his wrinkled old hands, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg unfolded the text of the imperial oath before the Czar. In a clear and loud voice, Nicholas repeated the old Slavonic phrases. He swore to preserve the principles of Orthodox faith and imperial autocracy and to be alone responsible to God for the fate of people and country.

The words of the Czar fell like so many priceless gems from his lips ; the words of the Metropolitan resounded in the solemn quiet of the cathedral as he affirmed the imperial oath with the benediction : "The blessings of the Holy Ghost be with Thou. Amen."

Presently, the two oldest Metropolitans of Russia approached the monarch and wrapped his frail figure in the imperial cloak of purple. Next, Nicholas lifted the great crown from its cushion and himself placed it upon his head as a symbol that he did not receive the crown through the mediating hand of the Church, but directly from God.

The sceptre in his right hand and the orb of the Empire in his left,



THE DOWAGER EMPRESS, MARIA FEODOROVNA



the Czar then ascended the throne. As soon as he was ensconced, the Czarina slowly approached him. She knelt before him, crossing herself fervently. Enthroned, the Czar removed the crown from his head and for a moment touched the Czarina's brow with it, thus denoting that the Czarina's prerogatives came neither from God nor from the Church; they were derived solely from the grace of the porphyrogenite—he who was born to the purple.

Now Czar and Czarina sat enthroned. Before them appeared the gold cloaked figure of the Protodeacon. His loud, deep voice ringing to the rhythm of ecclesiastical chant, he read the entire imperial title, and each syllable of each word of the great name resounded like festive chimes issuing from the tower of czarist omnipotence.

The voice of the Protodeacon ceased. The Czar arose. Before him the doors of the Holy of Holies were opened. He entered. In the semi-darkness of the sanctuary the Czar was endowed with the miracle of anointment. To the accompaniment of mystical prayers, the Metropolitan touched the brow, eyes, nose, mouth, chest, and hands of the Czar with a golden wand which he first had dipped into myrrh. Then the ruler reached for the sacramental wafer with his own hand, manifesting that he, the Anointed One, was also the Supreme Head of the Church. Next the Metropolitan touched the brow of the Czarina with his golden wand and the Czar placed the diamond tiara upon the head of his consort.

Thus the ceremonial rites came to an end. The bells of the cathedral announced to the city that the crown of the Romanovs once more rested upon the head of an anointed monarch.

Nicholas II left the cathedral and mounted his steed to ride through the streets, lined with people from all the regions of his far-flung realm. There were slant-eyed Kirghizes; Tckines, in multi-coloured, flowing garments; slender and elegant Georgians; Samoyedes, Poles, Tatars, and long-bearded, dignified *mushiks*; village magistrates and church-deacons from the provinces. One and all exultantly gazed upon their newly crowned ruler.

The procession paused before every old church in the Kremlin. Each chapel, each basilica was entitled to the honour of the imperial visit. The long prayers seemed to tire the Czar. He looked pale and distraught when he entered the small Basilica of the Archangels. While the priest chanted the prayers, the Czar recalled how, two years ago, the body of his father Alexander III had lain in state in the same edifice. That time, too, the small room had been filled with incense and a multitude also had assembled before the portal. Present and past suddenly merged into one. The festive procession changed into a funeral *cortège*. The prayers of thanks sounded strangely like litanies for the departed. The Czar swayed. Instinctively his right hand gripped for support and, with a metallic echo, the golden sceptre fell to the ground. The white face of the Czar grew still paler. Solicitous courtiers sprang forward and handed the sceptre back to him. Wheeling around, Nicholas II hurriedly left the basilica. With the exception of

the courtiers standing nearby, nobody had observed the incident. But those who had witnessed it looked at each other in alarm and tremblingly whispered: "He was born on the day of the sufferer Job."

In the Red Square before the palace of the czars three hundred thousand humans—representing more than a hundred peoples of his realm—stood waiting. They had assembled as early as four o'clock in the morning. Fully eleven hours these three hundred thousand had waited for a glimpse of their Czar. The sun beat down upon them; a heavy cloud of dust hung over the square. Dull and speechless, the multitude waited. The *mushiks* were imbued with the belief that every pain, every worry, every sickness would disappear if, on the day of coronation, they could catch just one glance of Him whom God had blessed. On that day, Czar and God merged into a Holy Oneness. For long hours the patient *mushiks* waited to partake of that blessing of a living godhead.

It was not before three o'clock that the procession arrived at the Kremlin gate. Heralds, popes, granddukes, ambassadors from every corner of the world, and women bedecked with gold and diamonds, passed by. The solitary figure of the new ruler, in simple uniform, appeared on horseback before the dense throng. In humble wonderment they sank to their knees. The Czar dismounted. Together with the Czarina he strode across the threshold of the palace. There he halted, turned around, and bowed deeply before the subjects of his realm, three times touching the ground with his hand. The next moment the magic picture had vanished before the staring eyes of the multitude.

In all the churches throughout the country thanksgiving services were held. On this day of the coronation dancing and jubilation took place everywhere, with the whole country steeped in official celebration. Even allied France declared the day of the Czar's coronation a school holiday.

Upon the evening of the same day Czar and Czarina opened a Court ball. And as the imperial couple glided across the marble floor of the palace, flunkys distributed ten thousand meals among the waiting people in the courtyard. In the name of the Czar, each received a half-pound of meat, a pound of bread, sausages, preserves and a bottle of beer. During the entire night the guests danced in the palace, and the people danced in the streets.

The programme of festive events ushered in that evening was to come to its culmination on the 16th of May, the third day after the coronation. On that day the people were to receive presents from the Czar on Chodinsky Field near Moscow. Later the celebrated musical director, Safonov, was to conduct a festival cantata in the presence of the Czar. On the preceding night veritable pyramids of tin cups were erected on the field, each bearing the Czar's eagle; bags of cake and bread were heaped high. The distribution of all these gifts had been set for early the following morning.

In the years before the coronation, Chodinsky Field had served as a drill ground for a sapper battalion. For this reason, the ground was honeycombed with trenches. However, Governor-General of Moscow, Grandduke Sergius, uncle of the Czar, did not deem it necessary to fill in the deep ditches ; they merely were covered with wooden planks, a procedure which seemed sufficient to him to assure the safety of the people.

A torrid humidity hung over Moscow on the 16th of May. It was so oppressive as to be wellnigh unbearable. Nevertheless, even in the early hours of the morning all entrances to Chodinsky Field were jammed. In dull silence, five hundred thousand *mushiks* gathered together on the drill ground. In the distance the first rays of the rising sun crept over the pyramids of imperial tin cups. A pregnant, mystic calm hovered over the field. The half-million people breathed as one enormous, powerful animal. The atmosphere of the field became heavy with the effluvium of thousands of human beings. The sticky, stifling air bore down upon the multitude oppressively. Women, children, and *mushiks* remained motionless like so many black clods of Russian soil.

The air grew heavier and heavier. Nothing stirred. Slowly and invisibly, a poisonous cloud seemed to descend upon the people, enter their lungs, and throw the weaker of them to the ground. Women swooned ; children screamed. Suddenly there awakened in the dull, animal-like throng the primordial instinct of their forefathers. Wholly unaware of the part they were playing, five hundred thousand *mushiks*—as if driven by Fate—recapitulated on Chodinsky Field, in one short moment, the entire, century-old history of Russia.

Apparently for no reason whatsoever their patient slave-like suffering and waiting suddenly gave way to bestial and brutal tumult. With innate fatalism the unruly masses flung themselves in a chasm, recklessly plunging into the very jaws of death so that those coming after them could advance over their dead bodies towards the beckoning goal : the shiny tin cups, bearing the imperial eagle.

At that very moment, when the maddened multitude broke through the thin cordon of police, the history of untold millions of *mushiks*—the history of the whole of Russia, indeed !—the tragic fate of the last of the Czars himself, was symbolically depicted. Throwing to the ground the police captain who shouted warningly and pointed to the open ditches, the mass of humanity rolled across the field like an enormous avalanche.

Maimed and mangled bodies filled the trenches. People tumbled upon one another, shrieking and groaning in helpless despair. The heavy boots of the *mushiks* crushed the limbs of those who had stumbled. From the depth of the trenches arose the agonized cries of the injured. The pyramids of tin cups tumbled. In a violent paroxysm people fought for the glittering souvenirs, for the bags of cake and bread, only to fall into the ditches and be stamped into their own graves by the heedless mob. No police force in the world

could have resisted the wild onrush of five hundred thousand raving *mushiks*.

When the screaming, howling, babbling multitude had cleared the field around nine o'clock, the trenches of Chodinsky Field were filled with five thousand corpses, disfigured beyond identification. Nobody knew how the catastrophe had started. Nobody could explain how this horde of seemingly dull, long-suffering animals suddenly had changed into so many wild beasts who, stirred by an inexplicable urge, had rushed headlong into disaster.

At one o'clock, musicians—in deadly pallor—assembled on the field. While wagons carted away the last of the dead through side streets, Safonov stood waiting, baton in hand. At three o'clock, the Czar, obviously distraught, appeared in the pavilion. He was surrounded by granddukes and ambassadors. Expectant glances were directed at the young monarch. With trembling hand Nicholas II signaled for the music to begin. Over the field of slaughter, still damp from an orgy of death, floated the festive measures of the cantata.

On the afternoon of that bloody day, the Czar announced that the kin of each one who had perished would receive one thousand roubles from his private exchequer.

When the news spread all the granddukes in Moscow hastened to the Czar's palace. Shaken by the tragic events of the day, the younger members of the House of Romanov demanded that all festivities be cancelled immediately, that the Czar decree public mourning, and that Grandduke Sergius, Governor of Moscow, be dismissed. The older granddukes considered these demands exaggerated. What had happened appeared to them just an unavoidable accident which should not be permitted to interrupt the holy ceremonies. It seemed especially unreasonable to them that Grandduke Sergius should be dismissed because, by such a punitive measure, the entire ruling house would be publicly criticized.

The frail Czar listened to the speeches of his relatives silently. His soul was burdened with the blood of five thousand of his subjects. Only three days previously he had solemnly sworn to assume responsibility before God for everything that occurred within the borders of his realm. Now, he was depressed by the thoughts that what should have been the most festive day of his entire life had been turned into a day of deep mourning, and that in exiling the favourite brother of his father he would bring shame upon the dynastic honour. Ever since childhood he had regarded his robust uncles with reverence and respect. Directly after his coronation the young Czar found it impossible to change from an obedient nephew into an autocratic ruler.

Absent-mindedly he listened to the words of the young grandduke Nicholai Michailovitch, the most liberal and learned of the House of Romanov. His voice trembling with excitement, the young man exorcized the spirits of the French kings and their brilliant fêtes.

"Remember, Niki," the Grandduke concluded, "that the blood of

these five thousand men, women, and children, will remain an eternal blot of shame on your rule. Be careful to prevent your enemies from saying that the young Czar danced while the most loyal of his subjects were carted to the charnel house."

The face of the monarch darkened and he left the room silently. The festivities, however, were not cancelled.

On the evening of that dreadful day, a gala ball was given by the French ambassador, Count Montebello. Czar and Czarina had accepted the invitation. At nine o'clock, the hall was crowded with troubled diplomats and courtiers. An air of deep depression prevailed despite the lovely melodies, issuing from the orchestra; indeed, they seemed like a dirge. The guests moved through the hall like ghosts. It appalled them to look upon the smiling face of Grandduke Sergius.

At the scheduled hour the doors of the ballroom opened. Czar and Czarina entered, the face of the monarch reflecting his unhappiness. The leader of the orchestra signalled and the measures of the quadrille filled the hall. The Czar danced the first figure with the Countess, the Czarina with the Count Montebello. As the Czar placed his arm about the Countess the four young granddukes—Nicholas, Michael, George, and Alexander—left the ballroom in a gesture of protest.

In a far corner of the ballroom stood a pot-bellied old man in flowing silk garments. He had a thin, drooping moustache, a yellow complexion, and small, wise, oblique eyes. He was His Excellency Li-Chun-Tshan, Minister and Ambassador-Extraordinary of the Emperor of China. Beside him stood the Czar's Minister of Finance, Sergius Julievitch Witte. The almond-shaped eyes of the Chinese were glued, with intense curiosity, on the person of the Czar.

"Your statesmen are inexperienced," the Chinese ambassador commented to the Russian minister. "Now, when I was Governor of Pe-Tshi-Li province, the plague swept my territory and people died by the ten thousands. However, I wrote to the Emperor that everything in my province was in the best of order. Once, when the Emperor inquired whether there was any sickness in my province, I replied that in my territory there was no disease, and that the populace permanently enjoyed the best of health. Tell me, Mr. Minister, why should I worry my Emperor?" And the protruding belly of the Chinese shook with half-suppressed chuckles.

The Russian remained silent.

Even as the Czar danced and five thousand corpses were dragged to the charnel house, and as Grandduke Sergius, smiling affably, strode through the ballroom, the news of the bloody festival at Moscow spread throughout the width and breadth of the land.

Aristocrats, officers, bureaucrats, popes and *mushiks* were harrowed by the same cankerous thought: The unlucky Czar!

The unlucky Czar!

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE CIRCLE NARROWS

**T**HE burdens of his reign weighed upon Nicholas as God's punishment upon suffering Job.

With the same resignation with which his father had isolated himself in the gloomy Gatshina Castle, Nicholas, from the day Alexander III died, renounced all the pleasures Russia could offer a young Czar. Visits to officers' casinos, yachting on the smooth waters of the Gulf of Finland, solitary walks, and attendance at theatres became ever less frequent.

Like his mighty father and other Romanovs, Nicholas was deeply imbued with the sacred solemnity of his imperial office. Unlike his forebears, however, he lacked the monarchical interest in administrative problems and that joyous intoxication springing from imperial omnipotence. To Nicholas his reign was a God-imposed task, and the eighteen hours which he conscientiously spent at his desk every day appeared to him merely as a sacrificial duty on the altar of his forebears. "I never go to bed until the last piece of paper has disappeared from my desk," he remarked once to a circle of intimates, and frequently the complaint appears in his diary: "Again and again, these ministers with their reports."

Oppressed by the solemn oath of a monarch, Nicholas II longed for the tranquillity of a simple landowner. It was not his love for power itself, but rather the consciousness that this power was decreed by God which, throughout his life, prevented the pious ruler from entrusting to others even a small fraction of his authority.

The official symbol of the Czar's life was a small, paper-strewn desk near the right window of his study in Czarskoje Selo. Supplications, petitions, reports, suggestions and denunciations from all parts of the country were heaped upon this desk daily. The strict rules of absolutism made it incumbent upon the Czar to read everything himself, and to sign all papers with his own hand. A splendid memory, inherited from his forebears, enabled Nicholas II to wade through the chaos with remarkable ease.

Constantly in contact with the different branches of the administration, Nicholas collected comprehensive information on the most divergent topics. Nevertheless, the precious gift of synthesis was withheld from him. The facts he collected never were sublimated into knowledge. Although, on the one hand, the ministers admired the Czar's ready grasp of things, on the other hand they were greatly annoyed by his predilection for small and unessential details. In his reign, as in his life, Nicholas was a miniaturist. In the same way in

which the contrast between facts and knowledge remained a closed book to the Czar, so the difference between administration and government remained obscure to him.

The innumerable orders which found their way from the Czar's desk into governmental offices usually referred to individual questions of administration. Of course, the autocrat of the Eurasian continent could only indicate principles of administration, and then merely in a general way. The execution of the all-highest instructions, the actual administration, had to be left to ministers, governors and officials.

In Nicholas's eyes the Eurasian continent assumed the aspects of a patrimonial estate where the lord of the manor must decide every question himself. The ruler of the largest imperium in the world was resolved to govern his immeasurable realm by applying the same principles with which the old Muscovite granddukes had administrated their small country.

Nicholas fought a hard, bitter, and hopeless battle for the administration of his patrimonial heritage. All measures decided upon by his ministers, even those that had been formulated according to his own instructions, struck Nicholas as forbidden interference with monarchic prerogatives. Nevertheless, he lacked that firm tone, that natural commanding manner with which the old czars had pronounced their decisions, no matter how irrational at times. Paul I did not blush or stammer when he prohibited his subjects to wear vests or to pronounce the word "representative." And according to rumour, Nicholas I, in all calmness, once ordered that a widow "be considered a virgin." Nicholas II, however, suffered severe scruples about dismissing a minister who had incurred disfavour. Whenever the Czar decided that a minister was to be removed from his post he would receive him in audience with warm, friendly glances, discussing in detail with the marked man measures which were to be carried out in the course of the future. Nicholas would agree to all suggestions and would even set the date for the next visit of the minister. Then, as soon as the minister returned to his office, he would find a letter from the Czar, couched in most gracious language, advising him of his dismissal.

The thin lips of the Czar rarely formed the word "No." But just as he lacked the will to contradict his ministers energetically, so did it prove impossible to win the Czar over to some measure which he could not whole-heartedly approve. His innate courtesy and reticence prevented him from propounding his will openly; yet the Byzantine shrewdness with which he dexterously eluded his advisors served to hide a stubborn streak.

Only once in his life, on the 30th of October, 1905—the day the constitution was promulgated—did a minister and a grandduke succeed in forcing the Czar into acquiescence. To be sure, both were soon to feel the unmitigated severity of imperial disfavour, since Nicholas never forgot humiliations.

That disconcerting, habitual politeness of the Czar and his obvious inability to display a steely will in all frankness, often were interpreted

as insincerity, trickery, and Byzantinism. However, the Czar's attitude was primarily an expression of deep distrust of all uniformed ministers, officials, and dignitaries, who interposed themselves between monarch and people like a wall.

Deep down in Nicholas's soul there burned a fierce desire to go over the heads of his officials and deal directly with the people, who looked upon him as if he were a veritable god. He longed to hear of their tribulations from the very lips of his subjects, and not through the mouths of old, pedantic ministers. The Czar's confidence in men was enhanced in inverted ratio to the number of their medals, dignities and titles. The less known a man was, the less able to foist his will upon the Czar, the more readily Nicholas II would discuss questions of government with him. Intuitively he felt that it was not the opinion of his ministers, but rather the uncouth speeches of common folk that yielded those truths which heavenly providence had chosen him to ascertain.

The isolated life of the Czar and the guards who watched every door of his palaces, offered insurmountable obstacles to this urge. The number of personal acquaintances of the monarch was very limited. His relation to the world in general was official and cold. Only by a happy stroke of fortune would the name of a simple mortal occasionally reach the ear of the ruler. Usually, these messengers from a freer world enjoyed the Czar's confidence to a much larger extent than responsible ministers, officials and dignitaries whom he himself had put in office.

Even during the first years of his rule the backstairs of his palaces would reveal strange and adventurous figures from time to time. In the darkness of night the shadow of some humdrum townsman or *mushik* would slink past a guard. Led by a silent courtier to the Czar's room, the secret visitor would offer his simple wisdom to the ruler of the mighty realm. First in the long line of secret advisers was a certain Klopov, a small landowner of Central Russia. His activities were the initial link in that long chain of odd events which eventually found a bloody finale in Rasputin's fantastic role.

The unimportant landowner Klopov, a kindly fanatic, had been brought to the palace by a grandduke in 1897. Every injustice that came to Klopov's knowledge worked havoc on his sensitive soul. Life seemed to him a valley of tears and he regarded the monarch as a God-sent messenger, chosen to alleviate the sufferings of each single subject.

When Nicholas I introduced his much-feared secret police he decreed that a handkerchief was to be worn visibly with the uniform. This handkerchief was meant to symbolize that it devolved upon these sleuths to dry the tears of widows and orphans. It was Klopov's ambition to become imperial tear-drier to Nicholas II. In order to restore justice in his vast realm, Nicholas gave Klopov three hundred roubles and a handwritten order in which all Russian authorities were enjoined to do everything Klopov demanded of them.

Like another Haroun-al-Raschid, Klopov travelled all over Russia, drying the tears of widows and liberating prisoners. By his presenta-

tion of the imperial order, laws were arbitrarily suspended in favour of those whom Klopov considered maltreated. The confusion that resulted was indescribable. For weeks Klopov annulled prison terms, granted pensions and, in general, brought succour to the Czar's subjects, until the ministers finally succeeded in inducing Nicholas to revoke the prerogatives he had granted to the misguided idealist.

The basic principle that animated the Czar—that restless search for direct contact with his people—was by no means disturbed by this experience. Quietly, imperceptibly, but with determination and tenacity, the Czar continued the strange game to establish patriarchal connections with his subjects.

In the same manner in which the Czar hid his inner strength behind the mask of polite indecision, the Czarina attempted to disguise her inherent weakness by assuming an air of exaggerated firmness. Alexandra Feodorovna had finely chiselled features, light eyes, and straight brows. The deep lines, visible at the corners of her mouth, indicated a sad youth. She never reconciled herself to the early death of her mother, the loss of two brothers and the humiliating memories of that painful period when she had been merely tolerated at the brilliant Courts of the Russian, English, and German monarchs.

Old Queen Victoria, who had shown especial interest in the motherless child, had seen to it that she received a strict Anglican education. The world of the young princess was an odd mixture of profound piety and girlish sentimentality. From his forebears Nicholas II had inherited a contempt for money and an autocratic disregard for all the rules of Court life. Princess Alix, reared within the narrow confines of her native Court, was not only addicted to German thriftiness, but enormously impressed by formal grandeur and obsolete customs. The supercilious Russian courtiers were astonished when, at the very first reception, the young Czarina, with remarkable persistence, extended her hand to be kissed by the oldest and most dignified ladies of the Court. Within the borders of Holy Russia it seemed unnecessary that imperial omnipotence should demand such recognition.

The narrow environment of her native hearth was completely in contrast with Alexandra Feodorovna's outlook on life. The Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt was keenly aware that she was a granddaughter of the Queen of England, and a cousin of the German Kaiser. Unfortunately her mother had married a mere prince of a small grandduchy, thus condemning young Alix to a back-seat among royalty. It was the ever-present consciousness of this fact which weighed heavily upon the young Princess's soul. How easily she, too, might have become the wife of an insignificant German princeling, forced to spend her life in the disconsolate *milieu* of a tiny German garrison!

The thoughts of the young Princess soared from the sad, terrestrial plane to the higher regions of the spirit. Theological meditations, for which her Anglican education opened a wide field, always had characterized the Hessian house. Analogous to the Romanovs, for many

generations members of the Hessian dynasty had attempted to surmount the bulwark of the official Church, eager to perceive with their own eyes the celestial face of the Supreme Judge.

Among the forebears of the Princess was the Holy Elizabeth of Hungary, and a picture of this mild martyr became the lodestar of young Alix, guiding her through the dark terrestrial valley of tears. The Princess's mother had participated in religious movements wholeheartedly, and her friendship for the celebrated theologian, David Strauss, had strongly influenced the impressionable mind of the future Czarina.

It was not until the Princess fell in love with the Russian heir to the throne that she returned to reality from spheres far removed from terrestrial doing. The hidden subterranean battle which she had to fight for Nicholas, the ill-will which the old Czar and Czarina bore her, and the contempt of the entire Russian Court which she struggled to overcome, inflicted upon her pride a deep, never-healing wound. When at last, despite all resistance, she had gained her victory, she was left with no illusions. She knew that neither her charm nor her beauty were responsible for her marriage; rather, Alexander's serious illness had not allowed sufficient time to look around for a more suitable consort for his son and heir.

In this way bitterness, suppressed haughtiness, and self-consciousness were the basic traits of the Czarina's character just as piety, fatalism, and suspicion ruled the soul of Nicholas II.

Every contact the Czarina made with the Russian Court, which once had repulsed her so mercilessly, brought on a veritable spasm of revulsion. Her breath came belabouredly; she blushed and the words died upon her lips. At receptions, while the Empress-Mother indulged in small talk with enviable poise, her daughter-in-law stood by awkwardly, self-consciously, a forced, frozen smile on her face. Courtiers, never suspecting that a Czarina could ever suffer from psychological inhibitions, interpreted her aloof manner as presumption and supercilious coldness. It was from the castles of the aristocracy that word of the haughty Empress reached the kitchen of the servants, in turn to be repeated in the streets of St. Petersburg and finally to be accepted as an unquestionable fact in all strata of the Russian people.

Czar and Czarina never conceived the democratic idea of courting the favour of their people. Peter the Great had eaten out of the same bowl as his servant. Beautiful Elizabeth had danced the minuet with any common soldier. Even Nicholas I had not considered it beneath his imperial dignity to address passers-by on the streets. To Nicholas II and Alexandra, however, it seemed undignified to invite popularity in this manner. God had enthroned them above their people, and the love of their people supposedly was passed on to the imperial couple together with the burden of the crown. It was not the monarch who must solicit the favour of his subjects; on the contrary, the people had to curry the favour of their monarch.

The strange religious fervour which imbued the Czarina impressed

the sophisticated courtiers as odd and affected. For an Anglican princess, only recently converted to the Orthodox faith, she seemed much too intent upon furnishing an example of Russian piety. However, the ardour of a proselyte was in complete agreement with the entire mental make-up of the young Czarina. The change of faith had not been easy for her. A few days before her engagement, Nicholas wrote into his diary: "We talked until midnight, but in vain. She will not change her faith and she is always weeping."

In order to justify her change of religion before her own conscience, Alexandra Feodorovna had to be convinced that the Orthodox faith was the best, the most beautiful, and the noblest in the entire world. A born Russian could permit himself to look upon the solemn pomp of his Church with a touch of ironic doubt. However, the Czarina—if she was not to lose her self-esteem—had to accept, unconditionally, all customs, rites, and mysteries of her newly adopted faith. The Russian mysticism of the sixteenth century warred against the enlightenment which the lecture halls of Cambridge once had brought to this European girl.

The Czarina ordered a chapel built in Czarskoje Selo with a subterranean chamber where she might spend long hours in silent prayer. Assiduously she studied the Russian Church language. Her desk was heaped with the writings of the old Muscovite mystics, and her entire apartment crowded with icons. Embracing this new faith wholeheartedly, her soul soared to the accompaniment of the chimes reverberating from the steeples of Russia's churches.

But neither the solemn chant of Slavonic prayers and all the tapers in her subterranean crypt, nor yet her humble, pious immersion into the new faith, could change the European princess into a genuine Russian woman. The cloak of a dreamy, Russian mystic, merely disguised the European underneath. The fatalistic belief in the inevitability of a terrestrial destiny—that typically Russian belief which imbued the Czar—never fully became part of the Empress, despite her intense religiosity. Her soul overflowed with that European unrest, that Faustic urge, which longs to shape events instead of accepting them with pious equanimity. Lacking true strength of soul, her Faustic urge frequently manifested itself as stubbornness and greed for power.

While the Emperor always liked to think his acts were inspired by God, the Empress, whenever she offered advice, would base her suggestions upon logical arguments. Her inner restlessness, her endeavour to mould fate herself, increasingly assumed the form of an exaggerated, almost pathological, energy. She meddled in everything: Affairs of state, Court questions, family problems, politics and religion, war and government. With energetic words she pushed courtiers and officials aside, and dictated her will in the honest conviction that mundane fates should be guided by mundane hands. "I must prove myself a medicine for confused minds," she once wrote to the Czar. And in another letter she even penned the audacious words:

"Invisibly, I wear trousers and, oh, how I yearn to prove it to these idiots."

Unlike his consort, Nicholas was convinced that God's will assigns man to a magic circle from which there is no escape. Secretary of State, Polovzov, who knew the Czar intimately, wrote in his diary: "The Emperor believes man has no influence whatsoever on the development of terrestrial events. God does everything through His Anointed One, the Czar. Consequently he need not accept the advice of anyone else, merely following inspiration from on high."

The Czar's equanimity, sometimes assuming positively heroic forms, did not spring from stoicism but from deep, sincere religion, truly remarkable in its strength. Any outside interference in questions of government appeared to the Czar as a sin against God. The Czarina, however, regarded such meddling merely as opposition to the prerogatives of her imperial husband. Her idea of the nature of the Czar's omnipotence was very vague and undefined, his power seeming as limitless to her as his realm. That the omnipotence of the Czar found a self-imposed limitation in the very laws he himself promulgated, impressed the Czarina as a liberal, and therefore sacrilegious, thought. To her mind the Czar was above the law. She considered the ministers, who tried to explain to her that even the Czar could go beyond the law only if he rescinded it in principle, messengers of the revolution. Throughout her life, Alexandra Feodorovna never could distinguish between autocracy and despotism, notwithstanding that Count Speransky had defined this difference in the eighty-seventh clause of the fundamental laws of the Russian Empire.

The erratic restlessness of the Czarina furnished a striking contrast to the complete equanimity of her consort. While the Czar would accept the worst blows of fortune with an admirable display of calmness, the Czarina found it impossible even to extend her hand to a minister or diplomat whom she disliked. If such a greeting was unavoidable, the Czarina often suffered from a choking sensation in her throat, rendering it virtually impossible for her to talk.

Many of the Czar's habits and beliefs differed greatly from those of his consort. Nicholas liked to take long, solitary walks, while the Czarina preferred the isolation of her chapel. The Czar thought it useless to resist the will of God and considered himself condemned to rule. The Czarina thought she could move the whole world with her words; yet, all that was expected of her was to give Russia an heir to the throne, having borne only daughters so far. The Czar wanted to build a bridge to his people over the heads of his ministers. But the Czarina attempted to establish a connection between herself and God through the mediation of the Church.

Despite these differences, the life of the imperial couple was blessed with an undisturbed, almost *bourgeois*, happiness. As much as Nicholas II suffered under the burden of his reign, just as much he yearned for the cosy hours of family life. The beautiful palace of Czar-skoje Selo, where the imperial couple spent the greater part of the year,

became an idyllic island of love on whose shores the raging Russian ocean broke powerlessly.

At an early hour each morning, a page, bearing a lovely bouquet of flowers, hastened to the suite of the Czarina. In her lavender boudoir, the Czarina, reclining on a chaise-longue, received the morning visit of her husband. The couple then had breakfast served to them by a coloured flunkey. After breakfast and short walk, the Czar repaired to his study, to the obvious disappointment of the Czarina. Every separation, even of the shortest duration, excited the Czarina to such an extent that the Emperor postponed politically important trips if, for some reason, his consort could not accompany him. Alexandra Feodorovna spent the hours which the Czar had to dedicate to the business of ruling in tense anticipation. Now and then, a short whistle issued from the Emperor's study, whereupon the Czarina flushed and promptly left her books—even her guests—to follow her husband's call in joyous excitement.

In their hours of congenial companionship, Nicholas called his wife "Sunshine" while Alexandra had nicknamed her husband "Scamp." An historian of that time paints the marital happiness of the imperial couple as follows: "There never was a single unfriendly word exchanged between them. At all times, both were inspired by a tender consideration for each other and assiduously avoided hurting each other even by a glance. From the very beginning of the marriage, to their tragic end together, there always was something in their relations and their manner of talking to each other that reminded one of newly-weds. Their mutual love never diminished in the slightest degree."

The Czar's diary contains many indications of his serene family life which was interrupted only by the burdens of government. "Again I had to spend the morning receiving reports. In the afternoon, however, I took a walk through the park with Alix. It seems impossible for us to be separated."—"Because I was busy in the morning, I did not see dear Alix at all. But in the afternoon we took a trip to Pavlovsk to admire the beautiful sunset."—"We had lots of time for ourselves to-day. We had breakfast and dinner alone. It is impossible for me to describe how happy life for two can be in Czarskoje Selo." To this remark, the Czarina wrote the annotation: "Your little wife adores you."

On free afternoons Czar and Czarina would sit together, glancing through magazines and family albums, and talking over the incidents of the day. The Czarina would sew, or dress dolls for her daughters, and the Czar would read, in a voice trembling with emotion, from the works of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev, and Tcheckov.

Only now and then was this quiet life interrupted by yachting in the Gulf of Finland or trips to the Crimea. In the southland, the Czar took his long walks or went bicycling, bathing, rowing, or played tennis. Meanwhile the Czarina lit a camp-fire on an idyllic meadow to prepare a meal of venison, bagged by the Czar, and mushrooms she herself had gathered.

In giving themselves over to this peaceful, secluded life and withdrawing from the outside world, the imperial couple estranged themselves from generals, diplomats, politicians, and savants who once had commingled at the magnificent Court of the czars. The happier this intimate life became for the imperial couple, the larger grew the number of those who remained uninvited. These outsiders felt slighted to the point of insult, and sorely missed the receptions and balls of old times.

As even the visits of relatives were limited, in the course of time the dissatisfied grumbling of the aristocrats was presently joined by the disapproving voices of imperial cousins and uncles. Gradually, the imperial residence became very quiet. The social life of the capital centred more and more in the *salons* of ladies, dabbling in politics, and ever fewer ministers, courtiers, and relatives could boast of regular contact with the Czar.

Alexander III, despite his isolation, had never neglected the necessary duties of representation, but the Court of his son soon was deserted. The negroes, at the threshold of the imperial rooms, stood sleepily at the wide doors which very rarely now were thrown open to visitors.

The number of disgruntled aristocrats grew all the time. First in cautious whispers, then louder and louder, the strangest rumours were spread about the happy imperial couple. The Czarina, still remembering those days before her engagement when she sensed a secret opponent in every courtier and minister, made no effort to win over the capital. The emptiness surrounding the little house at Czarskoje Selo grew more pronounced all the time ; more and more, disconcerted with the unworldly idyll of the imperial couple, aristocrats and politicians fled into the *salons* of the disgruntled. Within the imperial circle only a few people remained in intimate contact with the monarch. Those few alone might conceivably have a hand in the political life of Russia one day.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CLOUDS AROUND THE THRONE

**T**HE inhabitants of the Neva metropolis were wont to call their city "Peter" after their great Czar. Returning from the Dutch town of Zaandam, where he had learned the carpenter's trade, Peter had built his proud new capital city on the banks of the fourteen rivers.

Cold, solid granite clothed the Neva. Palaces lined the embankments of the rivers and canals. Magnificent cathedrals threw their shadows across the squares. On the granite of the Neva banks, the Italian wizard Rastrelli erected the monumental grandeur of the Winter Palace. Through the fog gleamed Falconet's statue, immortalizing the founder of the city on horseback, ascending a rock at full gallop and pointing at the Neva triumphantly.

The curses of countless peasants upon whose very bones St. Petersburg had been erected hovered over the proud city. In the white nights of St. Petersburg, in the quivering twilight of a pale, yellowish sun, people were terrified by evil nightmares. The ice-covered city, steeped in gloom, was seemingly bewitched and the thoughts, deeds, and dreams of its inhabitants were heavy and depressed. Shadowy figures seemed to dance around Rastrelli's masterpiece; greedy hands stretched toward the palace. Bemedalled old men, ambitious youths, parade generals, and parlour priests beleaguered all entrances to the Czar's abode. Conflicting desires, plans and hopes converged in the marble halls of the palace, colliding with, or merging into, one another—in the end to harass, like so many spectres, the pale, youngish man who, from his desk, stared dreamily into the cold, enchanted distance of the icy expanse.

During the first years of his reign the young Czar was surrounded, as if by a solid wall, by a crowd of grandducal uncles and cousins. Grandduke Alexander Michailovitch describes this clique in the most sombre terms. He writes: "Nicholas II spent the first years of his reign at his desk, listening, with a feeling best described as alarm, to avuncular advice and insinuations. Obviously, he was afraid to be alone with his uncles. In the presence of others they accepted Nicholas's utterances as imperial commands. However, once they were alone with their nephew, the difference in age immediately became noticeable. The Last of the Czars used to heave a deep sigh whenever one of his uncle's visits would interrupt his work. The uncles always wanted something of him. Uncle Nicholai Nicholaievitch considered himself a great field-marshal; Uncle Alexius Alexandrovitch desired to rule the waves; Uncle Sergius Alexandrovitch felt impelled to change

Moscow into a family estate; Uncle Vladimir Alexandrovitch was interested in the arts. They all had their favourites—generals, admirals, ballet dancers for whom something handsome should be done. Towards six o'clock in the evening the young Emperor was fatigued, depressed, and stupefied. He regarded the picture of his father wistfully and regretted that he lacked the ability and strong speech of that fear-inspiring, supreme moulder of Russia's fate. They all had feared Alexander III as they feared fire."

Only one figure stood at the threshold of the imperial suite, blocking the path of the relatives, and that was the young Czarina, Alexandra Feodorovna. In the eyes of the proud granddukes, this little princess who had become Empress overnight, ranked far behind the most distant blood relatives of His Imperial Majesty. Remembering her unfortunate quest for a husband, the relatives believed they could still dare to treat the Empress like an insignificant little foreigner. Her demands for full recognition amused the haughty princes. The more persistent she was in her demands, the more critically the granddukes observed every word, every gesture, even every costume the young Czarina wore.

As early as the first few days of her marriage, Alexandra Feodorovna confided to her German friend, Countess Rantzau: "The Emperor is surrounded by granddukes and grandduchesses." Around the same time, she wrote into her husband's diary: "Do not permit anybody to slight you or assume a predominating role." A few pages farther on, she added, half-imploringly, half-admonishingly: "Talk to me about everything, dear heart, you can have full confidence in me."

While the young Czarina fought tenaciously to maintain her position beside her husband, her relations to the imperial house grew increasingly cool and official. In a talk with her lady-in-waiting, Madame Elizabeth Naryshkina-Kurakina, the Dowager-Empress complained about her daughter-in-law: "She never tells me what she does, or what she intends to do; when we are together she speaks of everything in the world except herself. I would be so happy if she would throw off this reserve for once."

That cool restraint towards people who once had nicknamed her "Hessian Fly" and who now observed, with a mocking smile, her piety, her marital happiness, her every word and gesture, was never to leave the Empress. Her *bourgeois* sense of family, and her monarchical pride, revolted against the constant disturbance of the imperial duties, and the imperial family life, occasioned by the endless visits and advice of interfering relatives. The sabre-rattling granddukes, bedecked with medals, the grandduchesses dressed in the height of fashion, and the stern mother-in-law appeared to the Czarina as baleful messengers of that glittering, hateful world of St. Petersburg which everlastingly sought to intrude upon her peaceful seclusion.

In an invisible but none the less bitter battle stretching over years, Alexandra Feodorovna succeeded in gaining the undivided love and



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COSTUME OF THE MIDDLE AGES



unswerving confidence of her husband. The tender love of the Czarina was victorious over the calculating love of the relatives, and the more Nicholas came to appreciate the simple joys of family life, the more energetically he freed himself from shackles forged by the demands of his relatives.

Just as the Czar had least confidence in those ministers who displayed the most medals and answered to the highest titles, so his distrust was aimed primarily against those relatives who were closest to him by ties of blood. The Byzantine politeness of the Czar disguised his underlying suspicion and, consequently, there never were embarrassing scenes or arguments in the family. Nevertheless, in the course of time, the cloud of imperial disfavour darkened his relations to those nearest of kin who should have been the natural pillars of throne and monarchy.

While young, more distant, relatives still gloried in the sun of imperial favour, it was soon known all over St. Petersburg that the distrust of the monarch was primarily directed against the woman whose iron will overshadowed the first years of his reign and who, until the very last, preserved her remarkable personality: The Empress-Mother, Maria Feodorovna.

Within the compass of the entire history of modern times, no other human being was unluckier and more persistently persecuted by cruel fortune than Dowager-Empress, Maria Feodorovna. This fragile, *petite* woman suffered the fate of a heroine in a classic tragedy. She survived everybody and everything near and dear to her: Her husband, the throne, and the Church. She survived the tragic murder of her sons and grandsons, the debacle of the realm, the end of the dynasty, and the assassination of the majority of her friends and relatives. She was one of the few who escaped the inferno, unseared, only to carry the burden of life for many more years, impoverished, ill, and half-forgotten by the world.

The premonition of future misfortunes cast its shadow, early, over the countenance of Empress Maria. Her features were petrified into a veritable mask. After the death of her husband, she never displayed any emotional reaction. Neither smiles nor frowns ever appeared on her face. During gala receptions, her eyes fell upon the guests with mechanical graciousness and, at daily mass, they expressed, just as automatically, prescribed piousness. Her mask-like face bespoke such overpowering coldness that even members of her intimate circle never probed into her soul. The masses were spellbound with a superstitious awe of the Dowager-Empress. In the villages, among the *mushiks*, and in the market-places, awestruck people whispered that the Empress-Mother had the wrinkles of her face filled out with porcelain. That Maria Feodorovna did not show her age, and that she could neither laugh nor cry any longer, was because of this "mask." She was simply condemned to eternal youth! The frigid face of the Dowager-Empress hardly relaxed into a smile when she was informed of the birth of her grandson, Czarevitch Alexius. It remained just as frozen

and devoid of interest, years later, when an imperial courier advised her that Czar and Czarina had abdicated, and that the monarchy was no more.

The Empress Maria was a Danish princess. From her homeland she brought the coolness of her behaviour to the magnificent St. Petersburg Court. The imperial crown which graced her head for more than a decade did not change her into a Russian woman. She spoke Russian poorly and hardly ever wrote in the language of her adopted country. For old dynastic reasons, she despised everything German, including her daughter-in-law who was a German princess.

Every evening, in the quietude of her study, the Empress reached for the Court calendar and entered, in Danish, the incidents of the day, relieving herself of anxiously hidden secrets that troubled her soul. Nobody in the world knew anything of the existence of this diary until years later. The yellowed leaves record everything that occurred in the life of this woman: Unsatisfied love, longing for sympathy, and the premonition of imminent disaster. She perceived that the crown rested none too firmly on the head of her son, yet her own clever hands—so dexterous in matters of intrigue—proved powerless to insure that crown. Imbued with the desire to see the Romanov crown upon a head which she deemed more worthy of it, she gazed about, perplexed. But no one appeared suitable to her. Her youngest son, Michael, who might have been her choice, was no longer eligible because he had married a woman of Jewish blood and subsequently was banished to Orel. From that moment on, the Empress would have nothing more to do with him. To be sure, after Michael, there loomed up a long list of more distant granddukes—all hopeless. The Empress worried over the future of the Empire, intuitively sensing its decline.

Czar and Czarina were afraid of the Dowager-Empress. Whenever she appeared, leaning on a cane, the Czar would talk of the weather, of flowers, or inquire about her health. Whenever she tried to warn her son, Nicholas remarked politely: "I absolutely agree with you, Mama." But the Empress knew that, a moment later, he would forget all she had said and she was deeply hurt. The Czar knew that his mother disapproved of the German idyll of Czarskoje Selo and he, in turn, felt hurt. He also realized that, in the past, the old Empress had exercised considerable power and, if she felt so impelled, she could make use of that power now.

Perhaps he even had caught some hint of the stupid, vicious gossip that recently had spread throughout Russia. According to these rumours, the old Empress had commanded an officer to shoot the Czar so that her son Michael might ascend the throne. The officer, a faithful subject, supposedly had appeared before the Czar, told him the truth, whipped out a revolver and shot himself before the very eyes of his ruler.

To be sure the story was pure invention. But then, nothing was really impossible in the House of Romanov. Had not Peter the Great had his son murdered? Had not Catherine the Great had her husband strangled? Had not the unfortunate Paul perished in the

belief that it was his son's scarf that had choked him? Everything was possible in the blood-stained glory of the House of Romanov.

After the rumour about the officer had died down, another story sprang up. Harmless though it was, it could be traced directly to the Dowager-Empress, and presently reached the ears of the Czar. It was in the summer of 1902, in sunny Castle Livadia. A house had been reserved in the village for Minister of Finance Witte. One day, despite the terrific heat, the Imperial Chief Master of Ceremonies appeared at this villa, attired in glittering uniform. "Sergius Julievitch," he cried excitedly, "I must talk to you confidentially."

Minister and courtier left the house. Amidst the old pines of the park, the Chief Master of Ceremonies said, obviously worried: "Of course, you know, Sergius Julievitch, that the Czar is ill."

"Why, it is just a touch of influenza."

"Oh, that's what the official report says. In reality," the voice of the courtier sank to a whisper, "it's typhoid fever. In a mild form, but just the same, it's typhoid."

"Let's hope His Majesty's condition is in no way serious," Witte countered quickly.

"Not yet, not yet, but that is precisely the reason I am here, my dear Witte. We must consider what is to be done if something does happen to His Majesty."

"God save the Czar," Witte exclaimed fervently, crossing himself. Then, frowning, he added: "I do not understand you. If some mishap should befall the Emperor—God forbid!—after all, there are laws that govern the succession to the throne. As long as there is no direct male heir, Grandduke Michael, as the next eldest brother of the Czar, would ascend the throne."

The courtier cleared his throat: "Of course, generally speaking, you are correct," he said, "but there is an especial, rather delicate point which changes the whole situation. The Empress is pregnant, you must know. Now imagine if the Czar dies and Grandduke Michael ascends the throne, and then the Czarina gives birth to a rightful heir! Just think what an impossible situation that would create. Wouldn't it be wiser, in case of His Imperial Majesty's demise, and until the confinement of the Czarina, to form a regency counsel consisting of the Czarina and the supreme dignitaries of the Church?"

Minister and courtier studied each other suspiciously; each could read the other's thoughts. "Lickspittle of the Czarina," was written on the Minister's face. "Tutor to Grandduke Michael," was mirrored in the eyes of the courtier.

Witte broke the tense pause: "Doubtless your reflections are important, but somehow I cannot share them. The laws governing the succession to the throne are the only unchangeable laws of the realm. Nobody but Michael would ascend the throne. Of course, it must somehow be made clear to Michael that, in case the Empress bears an heir, he must abdicate in favour of this son."

Even before that day was over the Czarina was informed of the

conversation beneath the pines. She bit her lips ; red splotches disfigured her pale face, but she never uttered a word. Witte was a power !

With the Czar convalescing—the typhoid fever had run its course without any complication—the Czarina brought him to the yellow beach beside the blue sea. Breathing heavily from excitement, she told him about Witte and his betrayal of the imperial family. “ He wanted to deprive our son—your son—of the throne.”

The Czar gazed at his consort, startled. What he had surmised for years, but had not dared express in words ; what he had not even dared to follow to its last logical conclusion, now became certainty in his mind : Witte was not only Grandduke Michael’s educator ; not only the most popular man in Russia ; Witte also had been Alexander’s most trusted minister and—more important than anything else—after Alexander’s death had become the one real friend of the Dowager-Empress. Witte never would have proffered an opinion regarding succession to the throne without knowing what the old Empress thought of it. Thus, this threatening intrigue led directly to the stiff, forbidding Court of Maria Feodorovna, and Witte was its most dangerous exponent.

From that day onward Czar and Czarina harboured an inexorable hatred for Witte. Nothing the gifted statesman did ever reconciled them. They suffered him only as long as he was absolutely indispensable and then rid themselves of him.

But they could not banish the Empress-Mother so easily. To be sure, the tapping of her cane re-echoed through the marble halls of the imperial palace very rarely now. The atmosphere of their infrequently shared dinners became increasingly icy. In the presence of the Dowager-Empress neither politics nor the rearing of children, nor yet dynastic questions were discussed.

Surrounded by her stiff Court, Empress Maria grew older. No word of grief or complaint penetrated the walls of her palace. For her, life passed with the mechanical regularity of a clock’s tick-tock. Day after day Prince Shervashidse, intimate friend and Chief Master of Ceremonies of the Empress-Mother, introduced a long row of granddukes and other visitors. The visitors kissed the imperial hand, stared shyly at the rigid face of the Dowager-Empress, bolted down their luncheon, and took leave.

The old Empress went to mass daily ; a book in her hand, she walked through the park. She certainly did not appear like an old woman, for she possessed an extraordinary amount of energy that burned in her fiercely. Visits from intimate friends were few and far between. Only on rare occasions did they congregate around the cold hearth of the Dowager-Empress. Adroitly, then, she guided the conversation into political channels and always she gained her point. At the old Empress’s fireside governmental problems were not openly discussed ; only hopes and desires were expressed. In time, however, these hopes and desires grew into purposeful plans. When, late of an evening,

friends had left the Dowager-Empress's palace, she would pray, long and fervently, in front of her icons, and then write a few brief remarks in her diary, invariably ending with the reflection : " How unpleasant, how sad is all this."

Although the intimates of Maria Feodorovna were small in number, at certain times they comprised practically the entire executive power of Russia. Minister of Finance Witte, who, on the sunny shores of the Crimea, had inadvertently aroused the disfavour of his imperial master, belonged to this circle.

Everything about the appearance and behaviour of Sergius Julievitch Witte reminded one of an elephant. His figure, his plans, his hopes,—all were tremendous. He was the tallest official of the Czar, and his shoulders were the broadest. His voice was rough and grating, his manners crude and awkward. In conversing with ministers, courtiers, and generals—even with the Czar himself—Witte delighted in resorting to the most vulgar and uncouth expressions. The frail Czar always felt ill at ease in the presence of this robust man, with his thunderous voice, who brutally smashed to atoms all the dreams, schemes and desires of his imperial master, obviously seeking to demonstrate the imperial inferiority.

However rough-hewn and inelegant the exterior of the Minister of Finance, his mentality was remarkable in its keenness and elasticity. Doubtless he was the most astute financier of whom Russia could boast ; in the eyes of Alexander III, his tremendous achievements had excused his rough manners, his modest descent, and even his Jewish wife.

It was Witte who had devaluated the Russian rouble, introduced the gold standard, and a tariff system, and covered Russia with a net of railroads. Thus he had laid the corner-stone of commerce and industry, eventually becoming a veritable dictator of budding Russian capitalism.

The premise for Witte's unbelievable career was neither a very good education nor a long line of illustrious forebears. He possessed no personal riches, but merely enjoyed the favour of Alexander III.

In 1888 Witte had managed the traffic division of the South-western Railroad, at that time a private enterprise. Once the special train of the Czar passed over its track with terrific speed. At one station young Witte boarded the imperial train. He explained to the Minister of Transportation that travelling at such a rate of speed usually ended in catastrophe. The Czar, who overheard this speech, emerged from his compartment. With a withering glance from head to toe, he scolded : " What nonsense are you talking ? I travel through the whole of Russia with the same speed and nobody ever interfered. It seems only here on your tracks it can't be done. Small wonder your railroad is in the hands of dirty Jews."

Witte did not reply to his Czar. Turning instead to the Minister of Transportation, he commented coolly : " Well, then, fairly soon His Majesty may be expected to break His Imperial neck." With that he alighted from the coach.

It was only a few weeks later that the Czar's special train was derailed at Borki. The immediate result was that Alexander dismissed the Minister of Transportation, drafted Witte into government service, and soon thereafter appointed him Minister of Transportation, Economics and Finance.

Witte, throbbing with the spirit of enterprise, entered upon his executive duties whole-heartedly. Presently he took a hand in all questions of government, regardless of whether they concerned the army, education, or foreign politics. He issued orders to everybody.

His gigantic plans and his imperious nature hypnotized the ministers. Nicholas II never could free himself of a frightful feeling of insignificance whenever this autocrat of finance hovered about him. Everything in connection with Witte alienated and antagonized Nicholas. Only with the greatest effort did the Czar suffer the distasteful voice, manners, and gestures of this irreplaceable man. The more aggressively Witte pressed his measures, the more stubborn grew the Czar's resistance, although he concealed his feelings admirably. The antipathy with which the gentle Nicholas regarded his minister's gross and brazen conduct was the beginning of the hatred that filled both men for decades, casting a shadow over the entire life of the Last of the Czars. Accustomed, from his dealings with Alexander III, to depend upon straightforwardness in the expression of an imperial opinion, Witte discovered, to his chagrin, that in the mouth of Nicholas II the word "Yes" hardly ever meant the affirmative, but usually was to be interpreted as a downright "No." With every ounce of his robust strength Witte despised the frail Byzantine aristocrat who, as he once described it, "is everlastingly looking for detours, and via these ever and again arrives at the same destination: A morass or a puddle of blood."

The Czar had decided that Witte's opponent was to be Minister of Interior Vjatsheslav Constantinovitch Plehve. When, after the resignation of Durnovo, the question arose who was to head the Ministry of the Interior, Nicholas turned to his old teacher Pobedonostsev for advice.

"There are only two possible candidates," Pobedonostsev said "the one is Sipjagin, the other Plehve."

The Czar knew neither of them well and inquired who would be preferable.

"There is no real difference, Your Majesty," Pobedonostsev replied insouciantly. "The first is a fool and the second is a scoundrel."

"Now, I am asking your advice seriously."

"And I am advising Your Majesty seriously. As far as the post of a Minister of the Interior is concerned, only a fool or a scoundrel would be suitable."

At the time the Czar decided in favour of the fool, and Sipjagin was appointed Minister of the Interior. Only after Sipjagin, on the 2nd of April, 1902, had been assassinated by the student Balmashov did the oddly recommended Plehve become his successor.

As an expert on Russian affairs, Prince Bernhard von Bülow describes the past and the character of this man as follows :

" Plehve was one of those German-Russians who, while not so cruel perhaps as the national Russians, made themselves even more hated by their methodical harshness and severity. He was a type seen in Russia repeatedly since the time of Peter the Great. Son of an impoverished East Prussian landowner, his father took him to Russian-Poland when he was still a child. There, his father, who had been unable to make a success of life in his homeland, eventually acquired a little estate. Originally young Plehve was brought up as a Pole. Later, when the father emigrated to the interior of Russia, the son developed from a Pole into a Russian just as quickly as he had developed from a German into a Pole. Honest Wilhelm soon was changed into the Polish Vazlav, and with the same speed and nonchalance Vazlav later metamorphosed into the Russian Vjatsheslav. Plehve was endowed with extraordinary working capacity, an iron fist, unbending will power, and great personal courage. Constantly threatened with bombs and bullets, he drove about in an armoured carriage, never informing the driver of his destination until he actually entered the coach. Nevertheless, Plehve remained a marked man, with everybody convinced that he would be blown to pieces sooner or later."

This strange, spiteful man Nicholas considered the most important pillar of the imperial throne. The entire policy of the Czar was a constant shuttling between the indispensable Witte and the highly esteemed Plehve. In turn, the two statesmen pursued each other with merciless and tenacious hatred. Plehve and Witte never would agree on one single question of government. If Witte believed that the Czar should look to the young Russian citizenry for support, Plehve held that the organs of the Russian police were the only legitimate protection for the throne. If Witte referred to the Russo-Japanese War as criminal stupidity, Plehve insisted that this war was a necessity for interior as well as for foreign political reasons. Plehve believed in the enforced Russification of all non-Russians, while Witte opposed it. Plehve was a reactionary because he was indolent and unscrupulous ; Witte's Liberalism was based upon clever calculations. Plehve would pray before every icon in the imperial palace ; Witte would pass by without a glance. Witte was opposed to the *obshchshina* and Plehve was in favour of it. Witte inflamed the populace against Plehve, including the Press and foreign countries. Plehve, on the other hand, submitted forged secret documents to the Czar, pretending to prove that Witte had ambitions of becoming president of a Russian republic. Witte was a straightforward man with the behaviour of an impostor ; Plehve was an impostor assuming the behaviour of a decent fellow. Plehve was killed by a terrorist ; Witte died in his bed.

That day in 1904 when Plehve was assassinated, Nicholas wrote : " In the good Plehve I have lost a friend and a priceless Minister of the Interior. God is punishing us severely in His wrath." In 1915 when Witte passed away, the Czar confided to a foreign diplomat : " Haven't

you heard yet? Witte is dead! This is the happiest day of my life." To this, the diplomat later added: "Indeed, I never saw the Czar in such good humour."

Although the two ministers exerted a far-reaching influence on governmental affairs, neither of them had a decided influence on the Czar himself. A minister of Nicholas II, from the very moment of his appointment, laboured under a cloud of imperial suspicion; the longer a minister remained in office the more intense grew the imperial distrust against the official executor of his will.

In the same measure in which the influence of official circles diminished grew the unofficial influence of those spectre-like figures who appeared in the imperial suite via the backstairs. Within this invisible Government a special position was occupied by Prince Vladimir Petrovitch Meshtshersky, not only because of the influence he exercised, but also for the length of time he was capable of exerting it.

Despite his renowned historical name and the influence which his publication *Grashdanin* commanded, and despite, too, the special position he enjoyed at Court, Prince Meshtshersky was not a greatly esteemed personage in the capital. His own brother—a high official—once stated that Prince Vladimir hardly belonged to those people whose blood relationship one could acknowledge without blushing. Minister of Court, Count Voronzov-Dashkov, bluntly refused to shake hands with the influential Prince, and even the cynical Pobedonostsev remarked that "Vladimir Petrovitch is a downright scoundrel . . . in fact, so despicable that I don't care to acknowledge acquaintanceship with him although I have known him since childhood."

Vladimir Petrovitch harassed the officials of the Russian Empire like a nightmare. Whenever he showed his face, with his finely chiselled aristocratic features framed by a greyish beard, in the office of one of the ministers, it always was to ask a favour for one of the many young and elegant officers and officials who, at that particular time, enjoyed the Prince's favour; he would refer to them tenderly as "my sons in spirit." If one of the ministers made so bold as to decline the princely intercession, the *Grashdanin* would publish long editorials, or indulge in innuendoes, in which the minister was suspected of revolutionary leanings, defalcations, and treachery. Frequently these articles were followed by a sealed letter from Czarskoje Selo, informing the minister of his dismissal.

*Grashdanin* was less the property of the Prince than of the Czar himself, who granted the Prince an annual subsidy of 80,000 roubles for the publication. The influence which Meshtshersky had exerted, first on Alexander III and then on his son, dated back to the childhood of the old Prince. At that time, Vladimir had been one of the few children chosen by Alexander II as a playmate for his eldest son, Czarevitch Nicholas. Nicholas had died on the Riviera in his youth and his younger brother, Alexander III, subsequently married his fiancée and ascended the throne. Alexander had adored his late brother and unstintingly transferred his love to his brother's friend,

Prince Meshtshersky. In tender memory of his brother, strait-laced Alexander III forgave the Prince his moral lapses and financed his paper. For this, the monarch received from the Prince long letters of advice, secret information, and denunciations.

Just as indulgently as Alexander III had treated the Prince, just so austere and unfriendly he had been treated by Empress Maria, who could condone neither the Prince's relations with the young officers nor his visits to the ministries. It had been under her influence that Nicholas II had stopped further subsidies for *Grashdanin* upon his ascension to the throne, and even had forbidden the Prince to address letters to him. However, the greater the alienation between mother and son became, the easier it proved for the Prince to gain the confidence of Nicholas II by interminable harping on the favour the young Czar's father had shown him. Presently, Nicholas II granted new funds for the publication of *Grashdanin* and, a short time thereafter, the Prince was able to exhibit in bureaus and in *salons* of the St. Petersburg aristocracy, letters from the new Czar, addressing him "my dear friend."

No sooner had the Prince been reinstated in the imperial favour, than he again compiled diurnal reports with mathematical exactitude. His not insignificant literary gifts wrought these accounts into amusing and interesting reading and, from the Czar's replies, it can easily be seen how well he was entertained with the Prince's letters. In these missives the Prince informed the Czar of his opinion of ministers and officials, and also revealed his quaint conceptions of the art of governing. "It is of no importance," he once wrote, "that contemporaries disapprove the measures of a monarch by the Grace of God. The future will reveal to everybody how correct a ruler always is."

The talented and brilliant letters of the Prince exerted a strong influence on Nicholas II, and the more frequently the ministers discovered recent issues of *Grashdanin* on the desk of the Czar, the easier it proved for the Prince to make ample provisions for "his sons in spirit."

The entire first half of Nicholas II's rule moved within the triangle of Witte, Plehve, and Meshtshersky. The raucous voice of Witte, the reactionary speeches of Plehve, and the poisonous innuendoes of Meshtshersky, accompanied the Czar to the cataclysm which was incited by the Russo-Japanese War, and which eventually severed the Russian world of the nineteenth century from the world of the twentieth century.

Besides these three the Czar was surrounded only by greedy relatives, by the cynical Pobedonostsev, and by a few courtiers like the anecdotically stupid Count Frederiks and the drunkard Nilov. They were pale shadows, completely lacking a will of their own, grovelling at the foot of the throne with canine loyalty and never once noticing the threatening clouds, gradually darkening the heavens of Russian autocracy.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT

“**M**OLLYCODDLE ! ” With this epithet, expressing utmost disrespect, General Tsherevin had characterized Nicholas II before the body of his predecessor had been laid to eternal rest in SS. Peter-Paul’s Fortress. Other officials and dignitaries, who thought they knew their young ruler well, expressed opinions in similar vein, at times resorting to unflattering comparisons. “ Nicholas II will be another Paul I,” declared Minister of Interior Durnovo, and this allusion to the most unfortunate despot of all the czars certainly did little to lighten the shadows surrounding the new monarch. The Supreme Procurator of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev, the young Czar’s own teacher, expressed his opinion in guarded, but none too respectful, terms. According to him, Nicholas II was too immature, too easily influenced and too dependent. Even Count Voronzov-Dashkov, loyal Minister of the Court and oldest servant of the throne, did not think he could retain his office under Nicholas II, “ because,” as this polished courtier expressed it, “ I am never able to do my very best if I must co-operate with people who are unable to keep their word.”

Two courses were open to the new Czar : One was that of his grandfather, Alexander II, the great emancipator and reformer ; and the other that of his father, Alexander III, the gigantic and implacable reactionary. While memories of his stern father might induce the young Czar to follow in the footsteps of Alexander II, his grandfather’s violent death could not fail to serve as a warning.

The first administrative measures of Nicholas II did not indicate which of the two paths he would pursue. A few days after the ascension to the throne, the Czar disbanded the Secret Palace Guard and, following the example of his late grandfather, walked, all alone, along crowded Nevsky Prospect. Reactionaries concluded from this that the new Czar’s rule would usher in a Liberal era. However, when a group of Russian emigrants submitted the draft of a Liberal constitution to the Czar, Nicholas II, to the chagrin of the intelligentsia, wrote on the margin of the document : “ What nonsense ! ”

Since Nicholas’s ascension to the throne, provinces, cities, and villages had heaped their congratulations upon the Czar, sending him addresses and memorials. In formal phrascology, the estates reported on the needs of the people. Neither new agrarian laws nor guild nor agrarian reforms appeared to the representatives as a suitable means of meeting these needs. They hinted at a limitation of the imperial power, analogous to the methods of Liberal Western parliamentarism.

Nicholas II viewed these supplications and memorials as a brazen attempt to make him break his oath as an autocratic monarch, responsible to God alone. Besides, he saw in these suggestions for a liberalization of the czarist regime, an implied criticism of his late father. On the margin of one of the memorials presented by the landowners' estate of Tverj—the most liberal of its kind in Russia—the Czar wrote the first severe expression of his rule: "Extremely unsatisfactory."

It was in the third month of his reign that all vague conjectures regarding the new ruler's political tendencies were definitely dispelled. On the 17th of January, 1895, Nicholas II received, in the great concert hall of the Winter Palace, the representatives of the nobility, of the municipal autonomies, and of the estates of his realm. The impressive room was vibrant with expectation as the Czar, pale and tense, appeared before the thousands awaiting him. While the representatives bowed in deep respect, the monarch's eyes were glued upon the little slip of paper which, hidden in the imperial cap, contained his speech. Then the Czar began:

"I am very happy to greet the representatives of the estates of my realm who have come to lay at the foot of the throne the expressions of their most humble feelings. I believe in the sincerity of these feelings which have always been inherent in every true Russian. However, I happen to know that, recently, at meetings of the estates, voices have made themselves heard which, carried away by senseless hopes, expect representatives of the estates to take part in the Government. May it be known by all that I am dedicating my strength to the weal of my people, at the same time, maintaining firmly and conscientiously the basic principles of absolutism advocated by my late, never-to-be-forgotten father."

Nicholas raised his slightly reddened eyes, his calm glance challenging the representatives of the nobility of Tverj. Then, suddenly, he added: "I proclaim this loudly and openly so that everybody may hear."

A stunned silence held the great hall. With disturbed countenances, the marshals of the nobility passed before the Czar, each of them offering the ruler a symbolic gift. When it was the turn of the venerable representative of Tverj to present the Czar with salt and bread on a heavy silver platter, the gift dropped from his trembling hands. The Czar was startled. He blanched as he gazed at the frightened face of the old man. Spilled salt and bread, according to old Russian superstition, forecast serious strife between donor and recipient.

Gloomy and depressed, the representatives of the estates returned to their villas, cities, mansions, and Liberal clubs. Presently, the whole realm re-echoed with the stern words uttered by the Czar concerning the "senseless hopes" of his subjects; it re-echoed, too, with the prediction of imminent strife between Czar and people.

Nicholas II had chosen the way of his father.

In the Liberal *salons* of the capital, aristocrats whispered to one another that only the cynical spirit of Pobedonostsev could have put into the Czar's mouth the words: "senseless hopes." In fact, a few

days after the Czar's speech, the old man asked, in a conversation with Princess Catherine Radziwill, whether he actually was looked upon as the author of the imperial address.

"Of course," the Princess replied.

Whereupon Pobedonostsev remarked: "I always thought I was credited with more intelligence and sound common sense."

"But who else could have suggested such an unfortunate idea to the Emperor?" the Princess demanded.

"You don't know, then? Who else but the young Empress?"

"Ah! But what does she know about Russia?"

"Nothing . . . but she presumes to know everything. She is more autocratic than Peter the Great and crueller than Ivan the Terrible. Her limited mentality makes her believe she is gifted with great intelligence."

Pobedonostsev's words were not meant to be known publicly. Before the world the old man calmly accepted responsibility for his disciple's speech; its autocratic spirit certainly could not surprise him.

Liberal Russia assumed that the new Czar who, contrary to his father, had found a calm and well-ordered empire upon his ascension to the throne, would return to the liberal policies of his grandfather. But Nicholas II, before deciding on any measure, invariably asked his advisers: "What do you think my father would have done in this case?"

The autocratic spirit of Alexander III characterized the first ten years of his son's rule. In the spirit of his father, the young Czar journeyed to Paris to reaffirm the alliance with France; he erected fortresses against Germany, and he built railways through China. It was also in the peace-loving spirit of Alexander III that Nicholas, during these years, dedicated himself to his most important achievement of that period: The foundation of the Hague Tribunal, the first international court of arbitration.

On the 12th of August, 1898, the Imperial Russian Government proposed to foreign countries that, in future, all difficulties between nations should be settled by peaceful means through international arbitration. Imbued with the Christian spirit of neighbourly love, the Czar desired to usher in an era of eternal peace for all the world. As the mightiest monarch of his time, he preferred to advocate the spirit of justice to the sabre-rattling spirit of war. The ruler of one-sixth of the globe appeared before the foreign countries with the mild mien of a prince of peace; and the first words of the newly founded tribunal, which commenced to function on the 18th of May, 1899—birthday of the Russian Czar—were an expression of grateful recognition for the peace-loving Emperor of All the Russias.

The genesis of this humane endeavour for peace is described by Witte—one of the collaborators in the plan—as follows: "In the middle of 1898 Foreign Minister Count Muraviev appeared in my office. The Count explained that he wished to invite my opinion on the following question: Recently he had received a letter from Minister

of War General Kuropatkin, containing the information that, according to reports just submitted, Austria-Hungary was rapidly reinforcing and renewing her artillery. Although our Russian artillery was a good enough match for that of Germany, in view of the Austrian measures it behoved us to consider re-enforcing our own ordnance appreciably. For this reason Kuropatkin had inquired at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whether it would be feasible to induce Austria-Hungary to renounce her plan of modernizing and re-enforcing her artillery provided Russia agreed not to change her own armament status. . . . I advised Muraviev that, according to my mind, Kuropatkin's proposition was absolutely unacceptable. Austria, in rejecting our proposal, might make us appear ridiculous ; moreover, such a proposal coming from us would announce to all Europe that possibly we might not be in a position to enlarge our own armament. . . . In the course of our conversation I also explained to Muraviev what damage the entire world, especially Europe, would suffer through increasing costs of armament, and how these expenditures would ultimately weaken the population, depriving it of a comfortable existence. All this in turn would accelerate the spread of Socialistic propaganda which, drifting in from Western Europe, was recently making itself felt even within the borders of our own country. . . . Obviously, Count Muraviev was greatly impressed by my ideas. Although they contained nothing new, they struck him so forcibly because of his general lack of culture.

"A few days after this conversation I received an all-highest command to appear at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an important conference. Count Muraviev informed us that he had submitted to His Majesty his proposal for an international discussion on disarmament. His Majesty had received his suggestions with favour. Thereupon, Count Muraviev read the draft of a manifesto, addressed to the Powers, aiming at convoking an international peace tribunal."

While the representatives of the Powers at The Hague dispatched an address of thanks to the Czar, a strange and depressing silence brooded over Russia. Humbly, the peasantry awaited the decision on their fate. In far-distant villages and cities, representatives of the estates discussed their problems in whispers, trembling lest they arouse the wrath of the Czar. Not an untoward word, not a single sound, stirred the country, and yet the very silence hid something sinister and ominous. The realm and the people within it—each led its own, encapsuled life ; there was no bridge between the two. The rigidity of the Czar's imperialistic ideology presumed to disregard the living spirit of the people. Similarly, to a populace bound to the soil, the exponents of imperialistic thought could not appear otherwise than as enemies. Besides, for the time being, power was still exclusively in the hands of those who were the pillars of this imperialistic thought. The provinces of the Empire were still administered by powerful governors, ruling over millions of people unrestrictedly. Grandduke Sergius still roved about Moscow, wild-eyed. The desk of the Czar

still was weighted down with most submissive reports of governors and governors-general. The monarch read these reports with mechanical diligence, jotting on the margin "Very happy," or "Very sad," and invariably writing at the end the phrase: "Read with pleasure. Nicholas."

However, actual conditions, hidden underneath the sheaf of reports, escaped the Czar's eyes. Unswervingly Nicholas followed in the footprints of his father. He signed ukases and laws, limited autonomous administrations already sufficiently limited, dispatched soldiers to beat down unrest and—following the advice of governors—decreed the so-called "state of intensified protection" over whole provinces. At the same time he secretly yearned to hear the voices of his subjects, to learn of their sufferings directly, and not from the lips of Liberal marshals of the nobility, or from the reports of reactionary ministers.

At last, on the 14th of February, 1901, the voice of the people made itself heard. On that day the first shot was fired against the imperial power. Minister of Education Bogoljepov was wounded by the student Karpovitch. As if it were a signal for revolt, a whole series of assassinations, murders, and assaults immediately ensued.

On the 2nd of April, 1902, in the building of the Ministers' Committee, Balmashov killed the reactionary Minister Sipjagin. In a marginal note on the report of the assassination of Sipjagin, the Czar wrote: "Irreplaceable loss." It was the first of a long series of similar marginal remarks with which the Czar annotated reports informing him of the murders of some of his best servants.

Despite these warnings and tragic indications of imminent disaster, the monarch's castle was enveloped in deep tranquillity. The conflicting feelings of the Emperor could find no way to the hearts of his subjects. In that mass of ministers and courtiers surrounding the Czar there was not one to interpret these storm signals correctly. The only one who could have done so was Witte, but the harsh voice of the Minister of Finance was wholly unsuited to influence the reticent and fastidious Czar.

Indeed, the voice of the people only rarely penetrated the seclusion of Czarskoje Selo, and only rarely a new face appeared at the quiet Court. The Czar made few new acquaintances during the years of his reign. Indeed, he did not even meet many of his highest officials and dignitaries before he actually appointed them. The more threatening the storm warnings in the Russian heavens, the cooler the Czar behaved when, emerging from the peaceful contentment of family life, he stepped into the curiously chaotic world lurking outside.

René Fülöp-Miller, with his innate gift for understanding the feelings of others, describes the relations of the imperial couple to the outer world as follows:

"As long as Nicholas and Alexandra moved inside their own magic circle they were beautiful, happy, good and charming people. The few who were admitted to the seclusion of their home admired the beauty of the Empress, the frankly joyous glances of the Czar, and spoke with

sincere admiration of the attractive traits of the imperial couple. Those who met them outside their quiet home and observed them at receptions, festivities, and other official affairs, and who were not deceived by appearances, recognized immediately that here were two shy, timid, and eternally embarrassed people."

A courageous voice occasionally penetrated the magic circle of the imperial private life. Occasionally the Czar found, among the usual submissive reports, a document informing him unequivocally of the state of his country. One of these letters, dated 1902, read :

"Your Imperial Majesty. I do not want to die without telling you what I think of your past activities ; what they should have been according to my conviction ; how much good your government could bring to millions of people and to yourself, but how much harm it will cause if you continue according to present indications. One-third of Russia is subjected to the so-called 'state of intensified protection,' which is akin to absolute lawlessness. The horde of secret and official police is increasing incessantly. The prisons, places of exile, and the penitentiaries are not only overcrowded with hundreds of thousands of common criminals, but also with political offenders. Censorship resorts to arbitrary measures that are worse than those of forty years ago. Never before have religious persecutions occurred with such frequency or been pursued with such cruelty as now, and these conditions grow worse daily. In the cities and in the great centres of industry, troops have been concentrated, their loaded rifles aimed against the people. Many places have seen the shedding of brothers' blood. Further bloodshed is in store all over ; it is inescapable. Because of this whole cruel administration the peasantry—those hundred million people on whom the power of Russia rests—are growing poorer each year, so that famine has now become a regular, almost normal, manifestation."

The author of this letter was not shackled in irons. The menials of the Czar did not drag him off to Siberia. The wrath of the Emperor did not fall upon his venerable head. The writer of the letter was Count Leo Tolstoy, and the Czar, who on quiet evenings enjoyed reading the works of the great poet to his wife, ordered that Tolstoy be granted unlimited freedom of speech.

Soon thereafter the adjutant-general of the Czar arrived in Yasnaya Polyana. The gracious words of the monarch were repeated in the study of the poet. Deeply stirred by Tolstoy's letter, Nicholas II invited the Count to visit him at the Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg. Tolstoy's words were to acquaint the Czar with the Liberal spirit in the same manner in which Dostoevsky's words had conveyed to the young grandduke the spirit of God-imposed autocracy.

The call of the Czar found no echo. The poet of gentleness refused to enter the palace of the emperor. Nevertheless, the Czar's words moved the descendant of the old boyars. As once, in days of danger, the boyars Tolstoy had rushed to the assistance of their Czar with men and mounts, so now the poet Tolstoy dispatched his son to the palace of the sovereign to perform the proud duty of a vassal, eager to warn

his master. And as once the gates of the Kremlin were opened to the boyars Tolstoy, so now the doors of the imperial study opened to Count Leo Tolstoy, son of the poet.

Czar and Count faced each other. In the quiet of the imperial study the words of the son mirrored the thoughts of his father. And even as the messenger to the monarch spoke, the shadow of the sage of Yasnaya Polyana loomed behind him, invisible but none the less gigantic. A strange ideology was expounded to the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias. This broad-faced young man spoke of the God-imposed humility of a true Christian, of Moses's commandments, of the duty of gentleness and consideration. Count Leo Tolstoy's speech conjured up before the Czar's eyes visions of Christian saints, who in pious ecstasy had preached the spirit of asceticism to the monarchs of old. Nicholas listened to the young Count's words with utmost attention.

This messenger of a poet-prophet propounded strange, nigh incomprehensible, matters! Now and then his words reminded the Czar of the inarticulate babbling of a babe. Yet Nicholas sensed that, for the first time in many decades, a Russian Czar actually was facing a man whose thoughts and deeds epitomized the Russian people and the Russian soul.

Was it respect for the Czar that had robbed the poet's son of clear speech? Or was it rather that two worlds met, with no bridge to connect them? In that fateful moment when a czar asked the advice of a poet he was told about the vanity of all things terrestrial, of the necessity of spiritual asceticism, of the sinfulness of mundane pleasures. In wonderment the Czar heard the Count's strange entreaty that, in order to save Russia, he must renounce his most trivial earthly enjoyments. He must no longer partake of meat and must abstain from smoking and drinking. By purifying his body he would bring purification to his soul.

The Czar silently studied the earnest young man. Was it possible that Russia could be saved by such measures? Should the Anointed One really embark upon a pilgrimage throughout his realm, clothed in a hair shirt? Verily, the rulers of heathens had done penance for their lack of faith by castigations. But was the Czar a pagan? Was not his realm a Kingdom of God? Had he not received the crown from the hand of the Lord?

The Count continued. The words of the prophet faded and the voice of the Liberal became audible now. Limitation of the Czar's power and a constitution! How often the Czar had heard these very words from the lips of Liberal politicians! Tolstoy's broad face reminded the Czar of the old boyars. At that time, too—many centuries ago—when the old Tolstoys surrounded the throne of the Czar, the boyars had demanded a limitation of the God-imposed omnipotence of the monarch.

Nicholas II closed his eyes. Perhaps he thought then of the one czar who had not received the crown of the realm from the hand of the Lord. That had been in the year 1606 when the rabble of Moscow had

rushed through the narrow streets to the Kremlin; when, in Red Square, the body of the false Demetrius had been burned to cinders; and when, in wild intoxication, the populace had shouted up to the Kremlin: "We want Prince Vassily Shuisky for our Czar!" Surrounded by venerable boyars, the Prince had appeared in the Red Square. Amid the jubilation of the mob he had received the blood-stained crown of the Czar. Under the stern glances of the boyars he had entered Uspensky Cathedral. Filled with anxious humiliation, he had kissed the cross, and had rendered the heterodox oath not to do anything of which the boyars might disapprove. Like a thief, who had stolen the throne from the Lord's altar, Vassily had been willing to share his omnipotence with the accomplices of his crime. But God's righteous wrath had descended upon the new Czar and the people who had renounced the tenets of autocracy. Famine and suffering had enveloped all Russia. Revolts had shaken the very foundation of the realm, and a host of enemies had destroyed the country. In cowardice, the warriors of the unworthy Czar had fled the field of battle. The army of the Polish king Vladislav had advanced as far as the Holy Kremlin. Bodies had covered the streets of Moscow, and human flesh had become the food of the rebellious people. Four long years God had chastised the country. Then Czar Vassily had abandoned the Kremlin, thrown his crown at the feet of the traitorous boyars, and locked himself up in a distant monastery where, as a humble monk, he had prayed for forgiveness of his sins.

The people had rued their sacrilege and, in manifold tribulations, the radiancy of absolutism eventually had become clear to them again. Ringing church bells had resounded in the Kremlin. The incense of prayers had risen to the throne of the Lord, and the chalice of the unfathomable grace of God had been emptied over the new autocrat, sixteen-year-old Michael, first Czar of the House of Romanov. . . .

Nicholas II raised his head. For two hours young Count Tolstoy had propounded the words of his father. Although the eyes of the Czar roved about the room, his gaze seemed to be probing the depths of his own soul. The broad face of Tolstoy appeared before him as in a dream. When at last he spoke, the Czar's voice sounded dull, as if coming from the distance of past centuries. He said: "I swore in Uspensky Cathedral never to share the power entrusted to me by God. I must keep my oath. Immaculately I received the burden of autocracy and immaculately I shall hand it on to my heir."

The solemn words fell from the lips of the Czar like an old, holy incantation, and as they were spoken, everything crashed to the ground: the words of Tolstoy, the memorials of the nobility, the shots of the terrorists, the supplications of the guilds. It was this expressed conviction which, like an escutcheon wrought of steel, Nicholas II held up for twenty-four years against all warnings, exhortations and supplications.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE CONJURATION OF THE CZAREVITCH

**A** LONG, rambling, three-story palace, surrounded by a large, bare garden. The eight Gothic columns in front, and the severe delineation of the portals, breathed the spirit of the gifted architect who planned them. Its ground reclaimed from the Finnish swamps by the excruciating labour of untold thousands, the palace, like the majestic statue of Peter the Great and many splendid structures along the banks of the Neva, was part and parcel of the austere magnificence of the imperial capital city of St. Petersburg. The Italian Rastrelli had erected this palace for the baroque festivities of the brilliant Catherine. But the Empress had decided that the edifice should be used as a finishing school where daughters of the nobility might be instructed in the graces of Court life, and where their beauty might receive an ultimate polish. Subsequently, generation after generation of Russia's most beautiful and high-born maidens grew up in the palatial Smolny Institute, officers of the Guard and courtiers dreaming of their pulchritude.

In the garden surrounding the Institute, an old, enamoured Emperor once hid behind the trees, stretching their branches desolately towards a bleak sky. At night a young girl would sneak out of the school and until the break of dawn His Majesty, Alexander II, and the youthful Princess Dolgoruky would wander up and down the lanes of the park in tender embrace. In the early morning hours the Princess would creep back to her room, the anxious glances of the Emperor following her. He was no less intimidated by the strict teachers than he was by his future consort.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century a future Queen of Italy and two future Russian grandduchesses—all three daughters of King Nikita of Montenegro—emerged from the Institute. Their royal father had once been mentioned by Alexander III as Russia's only dependable ally. Wishing to flaunt his utter contempt for the democratic West, he had declared publicly at a banquet that nobody could resist the united forces of Russia and Montenegro. The words of Alexander III had involved an obligation. Henceforth the sun of imperial favour shone on the dark Balkan gorge which is the homeland of the royal family of Niegush.

The imperial goodwill exerted a magnetic attraction, and soon, in the foggy streets of St. Petersburg, in marble palaces and *salons*, the Nordic aristocrats were to gaze admiringly upon the three black-haired, dark-eyed daughters of the Montenegrin King. Czar Alexander III had flung open the hallowed gates of Smolny Institute

to the princesses Helena, Milizia, and Anastasia. Once their innate wildness had been curbed and they had achieved a semblance of poise under the restraining influence of the Smolny school, the three exotic princesses lent enchanting colour to the imperial balls at the Winter Palace.

Their Southern beauty, tempered by the frosts of St. Petersburg, presently attracted the ardent glances of European princes. Princess Helena married the young Italian crown prince, Victor Emmanuel. Milizia and Anastasia remained in Russia and—although this constituted a certain offence against the laws of the imperial Court—married the grandducal brothers Peter Nicholaievitch and Nicholai Nicholaievitch.

The hot blood of the Balkans still pounded beneath the cool elegance of these two grandduchesses. Although their Montenegrin wildness had been controlled by basilisk-eyed governesses at Smolny Institute for years, nevertheless it was firmly rooted in the souls of the two sisters. St. Petersburg's society, which condescendingly referred to the two princesses as "those Montenegrin girls," offered too limited a field for their effervescent Southern *joie de vivre*. The fiery blood of Niegush threatened to congeal in a world of damp streets and cold hearts. Accustomed to the deep gorges and dark abysses of their homeland, the formless exhalations of the fog arising over the Gulf of Finland set the princesses dreaming of intoxicating wonders and breathtaking adventures. The frost-bitten world of St. Petersburg made them yearn for freedom, if only in spirit.

Around the turn of the century, within the Court circles of St. Petersburg, such a flight from restraint was possible only by attending spiritistic séances and table levitations. And this was the route which eventually revealed to the Montenegrin sisters the lonely soul of the Czarina. Alexandra Feodorovna, too, felt herself alien and misunderstood in St. Petersburg. Those haughty granddukes and courtiers who refused to recognize the brunette princesses of Montenegro as genuine royalty, also refused to look upon the little Hessian princess as a genuine Czarina.

Milizia and Anastasia, however, accorded the young Empress an Oriental, almost slave-like devotion. To them the Czarina's unimportant Hessian background was completely blotted out by the purple cloak she wore now. The eager admiration of Milizia and Anastasia assumed strange forms at times. If the Czarina felt ill, the grandduchesses served as her nurses, willingly performing the most intimate tasks. Since they were together with the Czarina frequently—often for many days on end—they won her confidence and affection. The soul of the Czarina yearned for that warmth and sympathy which St. Petersburg withheld from her. Despairing over the monotony of everyday life, she craved communion with spirits to whom she could unburden her imperial woes. Especially at that time the Czarina's soul was filled with ineluctable sorrow.

Alexandra Feodorovna was a beautiful woman—indeed, the most

beautiful empress of her time. In the eyes of all men—Russians and foreigners alike—she appeared to be the happiest woman on earth. After all little Princess Alix had made the most marvellous match possible. Now she had palaces and servants; more, hers was a tender and loving husband, anxious to fulfil her every word and desire, even her every thought.

Everything in the life of the Czarina seemed to indicate that she was the luckiest and most contented woman of all time. Yet her life was one long chain of disappointments, misfortunes and sufferings. A tragic and merciless fate pursued Princess Alix from the very moment she had put her foot on Russian soil, until that dark day when she descended into the cellar of Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg.

The grief that oppressed the Empress, around the turn of the century, was indeed great, and man knew not how to assuage it. The Empress had been unable to fulfil her full duties as the mother of her country; she had not given her husband, and the Empire, an heir to the throne. Four daughters—healthy, happy, attractive—had seen the light of day, but the longed-for heir had not yet come. Under the iron Paulian law, regulating succession, daughters of a czar were for ever excluded from the throne.

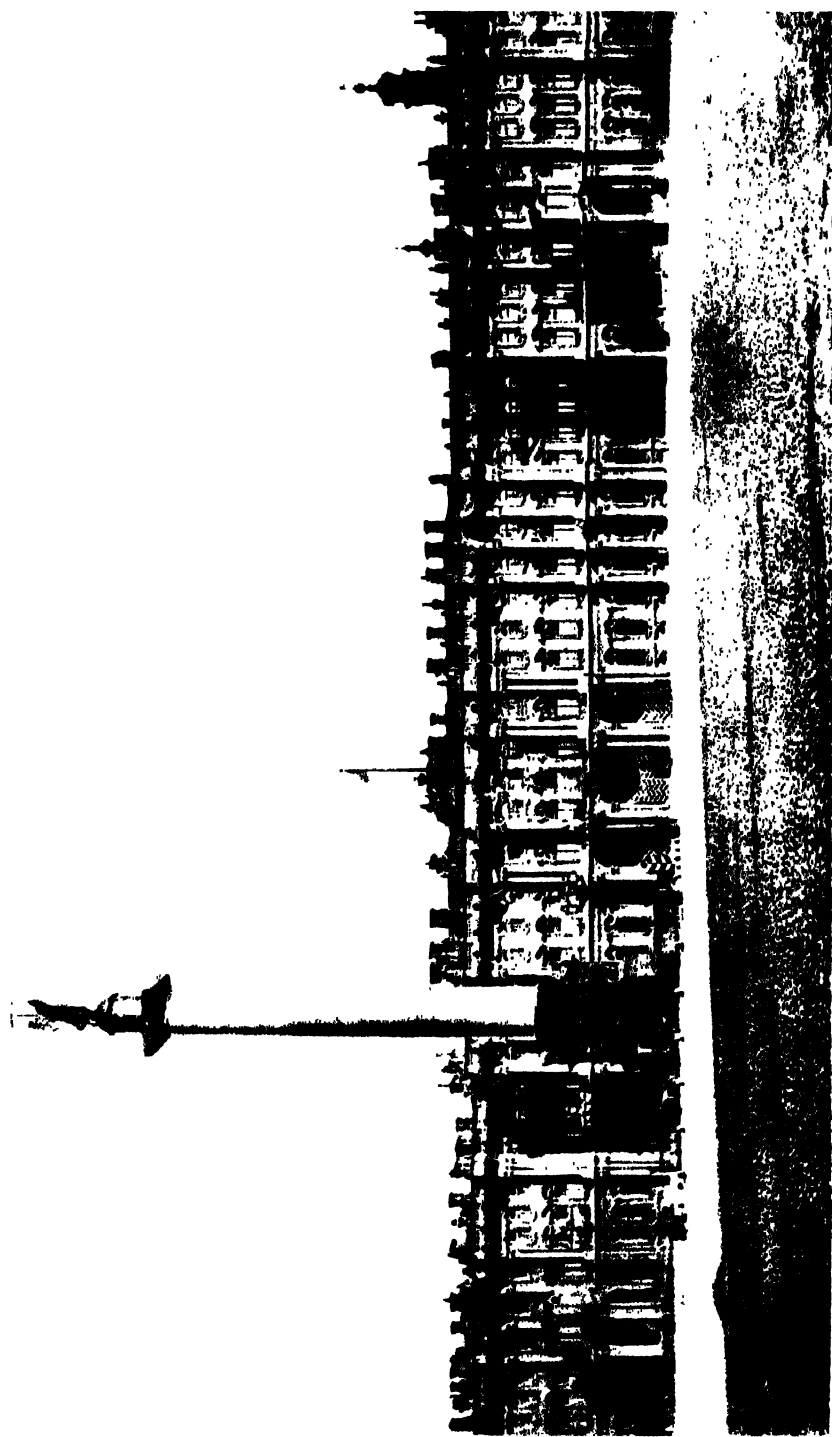
The four empresses who had ruled over Russia in the past had left painful and sad memories behind them. The slightest intimation from the imperial couple that, perhaps, one of their daughters might rule, some day, aroused such resistance in reactionary and conservative circles that Czar and Czarina promptly renounced the idea.

In many hours of intimate conversation, the Empress revealed her wretchedness to the Montenegrin princesses. Like them she believed that where mundane remedies proved unavailing, assistance could be invoked from the world of the supernatural.

Grandduchess Milizia was more closely connected with occultism than anybody else in her circle. Together with the Czarina she had attended many spiritistic table levitations, and it was now decided to set these secret powers in motion. In 1903 the Grandduchess sojourned at Compiègne. Colonel Count Muraviev-Amursky was a member of the select coterie which congregated at her villa each night. Through him she met "Philippe, the Miracle Man."

"This Philippe," a contemporary writer states, "was originally a butcher's helper and his real name was Nisier-Vachot. Strange as it may seem for a man plying that trade, Philippe was a dreamer. For nights on end he pored over books dealing with spiritism, magic, and mysticism. Eventually, these leanings toward the supernatural became so pronounced that his disgusted employer discharged him."

Philippe thenceforth dedicated every minute of his time to his strange pursuit. He settled down in Lyons where he plied the craft of a miracle man. After a few chance successes he experienced a number of failures, whereupon the Liberal Government enjoined him from practising further. It was this development which brought the former butcher's helper, Nisier-Vachot—now calling himself Monsieur Philippe



ST. PETERSBURG. THE WINTER PALACE.



—to the attention of the French Conservatives. He moved to Paris and presently surrounded himself with a group of people who managed to combine faith in the tenets of political conservatism with credulity in the tricks of a spiritist.

Grandduchess Milizia instantly fell under the spell of the Miracle Man. She concluded that a magician, recognized by French aristocracy, also would be able to capture St. Petersburg society. Thus the erstwhile butcher's helper, accepting the Grandduchess's invitation, arrived in St. Petersburg. There, at the small summer place of the Grandduchess in Peterhof, strange events presently came to pass. On quiet afternoons a select circle of friends assembled in the grandducal villa, among them Nicholas II, Alexandra Feodorovna, Grandduchess Anastasia, Grandduke Nicholai Nicholaievitch and Father John of Kronstadt.

In the twilight of magical incantations, the initiates lost all touch with reality. With the gates to a supernatural world opened wide, the guests were not at all surprised when, one day, the voice of Czar Alexander III, after some Conservative admonitions—parenthetically, albeit in all earnestness—reminded his imperial son: "Do not forget to give money, much money, to the King of Montenegro, and to good Monsieur Philippe, too."

Enraptured, deeply stirred, Czar and Czarina accepted all the strange visions which Philippe's power conjured up for them. Surely a man who could invoke the spirit of Alexander III from the past, also could wrest the soul of the unborn Czarevitch from the future.

The Czar himself did not withhold recognition from the Miracle Man. "Contrary to all laws," writes Witte, "M. Philippe secretly was honoured by the St. Petersburg Military Academy of Medicine with the degree of Doctor, together with the rank of Counsellor of State. Thereupon, the blessed Philippe repaired to a military tailor to order for himself the uniform of an army physician."

Now that he was Counsellor of State and a full-fledged physician, M. Philippe was in a position to prove his supernatural powers to the Czarina. He moved into the Winter Palace and immediately embarked upon a series of mystic invocations, aimed at blessing the Empress with a son. Surrounded by a Court that disliked her, and pursued by the reproachful glances of the populace, the distracted Czarina willingly placed herself under Philippe's magic influence. In prayers, in chastisements, and in the intonation of psalms, she implored God's blessing upon her womb. Before long, shaken by spasms, twitching in every fibre, the Empress felt a magic, supernatural power take hold of her body. A benign smile lighted up her pale face. The spirits at last proved victorious in these innumerable meditations and the Empress rejoiced in the discovery that her womb had been blessed for the fifth time.

"The Czarina," Witte says, "began to wear wide skirts. During the last few months of her pregnancy she discarded her corset, and everybody noticed that she had grown stouter. The Emperor glowed with happiness. The pregnancy was officially announced. The Empress

did not receive visitors any longer. The fateful months dragged by and St. Petersburg waited for the guns of SS. Peter-Paul Fortress to announce the birth of a son or a daughter. With the momentous event expected hourly, the Court obstetrician, Dr. Ott, moved into the palace with his assistant. When watchful waiting proved of no avail, Dr. Ott implored the imperial couple to agree to an examination of the Empress. Alexandra Feodorovna refused at first, but eventually acquiesced, and it was then that Ott ascertained that the Czarina was not pregnant at all. Expressed suitably, this disappointing news was conveyed to the country."

This tragi-comic interlude certainly did not serve to enhance the Empress's popularity. However, the imperial couple accepted this new misfortune with remarkable fortitude, and not for one moment did the hysterical pregnancy of the Empress disturb their marital bliss. Czar and Czarina believed that this fresh disappointment was only another trial which God had imposed upon the Czar who, like Job, must suffer in all humility in order to be rewarded a hundredfold.

Curiously, their faith in M. Philippe remained unshaken. He was dismissed with all honours, and the many gifts with which the Czarina overwhelmed him moved the former butcher boy to show his appreciation. Before his departure he presented the Czarina with an icon to which a little bell was attached. Staring before him, as one bewitched, the charlatan explained that the little bell would unfailingly ring each time a person of evil thought sought to approach Their Majesties. The Empress, still under Philippe's hypnotic spell, believed as firmly in the little bell as she believed in his prediction that, somehow and some time, Heaven would send her a mighty helper who would stand by her in all her terrestrial tribulations.

The Miracle Man departed from St. Petersburg and the longing of the Czarina remained unfulfilled. Nevertheless, she clung to the supernatural, regarding it as her only hope. Steeped in dream-like visions, the Czarina prayed for admission to the hidden world of spirits which alone could bless her with the desired heir to the throne. The Czarina's wish, originally aired only in the most intimate family circle, now was discussed everywhere. Courtiers, popes, wonder workers took council with one another to solve this baffling problem. They well knew that he who could wrest the future Czarevitch from the celestial powers would be assured of imperial gratitude without end. . . .

In the silent nights of spring, 1903, the inhabitants of St. Petersburg observed a small boat gliding across the leaden waters of the Neva. The man in the boat was none other than the Czar, pondering deeply. Drenched in moonlight, he stared dreamily at the ripples of the river. As he rowed, the silvery drops that trickled from the oars assumed strange and fantastic forms in the moonlight.

The people of St. Petersburg followed their ruler with sad and thoughtful glances. Everybody knew what troubled Little Father Czar as he moved along in the boat. During those dreamy moonlight trips the Czar thought of eternity, of God, and of the son which Heaven

withheld from him. Before his half-closed eyes arose the robust figure of his best friend, his grandducal cousin Alexander. In the years during which the Czarina bore her imperial husband four daughters, the Grandduke had become the proud father of four healthy boys. The envy that filled the soul of the Czar almost turned into hatred. The Czar thought wistfully, too, of his brother Michael who, in all likelihood, would ascend the throne of the czars after him. Superstitious fear had prevented Nicholas II from permitting the legitimate heir to the throne to assume the title of Czarevitch. Nicholas believed that by doing so he would admit publicly that he had definitely given up hope of being blessed with an heir.

However, not every means had been exhausted, nor all the spirits invoked. Now and then, during sleepless nights, the Czar commanded the Court priest, Father Theophan, to visit him. In conversations with the wily pope, the Czar, as supreme leader of the Church, solicited the help of the Orthodox clergy. For the terrestrial sufferings of his master, the pope had an appropriate theological answer. What the Czar and the Czarina lacked, according to his opinion, was a powerful mediator before the throne of the Almighty. Nobody could fill such a role better than the venerable Seraphim, a pious ascetic who, during the second half of the nineteenth century, had died in Sarov in the Government of Tombovsk. The venerable Seraphim was waiting outside the gates of the heavenly garden since his death, but only the powerful word of the Czar could grant him permission to join the happy throng of Greek Orthodox saints. Once admitted, the grateful Seraphim would exert all the powers of a saint in Heaven in the Czar's interest.

With tired, slightly reddened eyes, the Czar watched the silvery drops trickling from the oars. In their sparkle he envisioned the history and the sufferings of the ascetic. Seraphim had withdrawn from humanity. He had lived in the woods in the neighbourhood of Sarov. There he had preached to the peasants, blessed the barren women, and bathed in the little stream which, ever after, was famous for its healing propensities. From all over, peasants had come in droves to visit the ascetic. But Seraphim had not been satisfied merely to preach within the circle of pious believers. In mystic exultation he had made prophecies of Russia's future. According to a legend at the imperial Court there was a document somewhere forecasting events during the reign of Nicholas II.

The Czar now gave orders to locate the document. Surprisingly enough the prophetic writ was not discovered in a distant monastery, but in the archives of the Police Department of the Ministry of the Interior. The document read: "At the beginning of the reign of this monarch many plagues will harass the people. There will be an ill-fated war and great confusion will overtake the realm. Father will arise against son and brother against brother. However, the second half of his reign will be happier and the ruler will be granted a long life."

It was less these prophecies than the incessant pleadings of the Czarina which induced Nicholas II to agree to Seraphim's canonization.

The Minister of Interior Plehve, with whom the Czar discussed this plan, cried with emotion. In his disagreeable voice the statesman avowed how deeply he longed to shed pious tears over Seraphim's bones. To be sure, canonization was not within the scope of a Minister of the Interior, but entirely the prerogative of the Church, ruled by the iron hand of the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, old Pobedonostsev.

Pobedonostsev's amazement was considerable when he was invited to attend an all-highest luncheon, one day. The powerful, evil old man had been in the imperial couple's disfavour for a very long time, and only respect for his past achievements and his age had prevented Nicholas II from dismissing the cunning priest. During luncheon the Czar inquired of Pobedonostsev how he would regard the canonization of Seraphim. The deep-set, piercing eyes of Pobedonostsev viewed the imperial couple in disapproval. His dry, parchment-like skin gave him the appearance of a mummy. With quiet precision he explained that the Holy Synod could agree to a canonization only if the man to be thus honoured was dead at least one hundred years, and after it had been ascertained that his body had not decomposed in the grave. Moreover, the Holy Synod first would have to make investigations as to the pious life of the late Seraphim.

The Empress flushed furiously throughout Pobedonostsev's recital. With unmitigated hatred she regarded this old man who sought to cheat her out of her son. When Pobedonostsev had had his say, his snake-like eyes rested on the Czarina questioningly; Alexandra Feodorovna threw back her head defiantly and announced: "The Emperor can do everything!"

Pobedonostsev bowed without uttering a word.

Since the Emperor was omnipotent, Seraphim was canonized. Enormous import was attached to this development. In fact, courtiers referred to the canonization on the 12th of August, 1903, as the most important event in the Russia of the twentieth century.

Court and people, society and clergy, assembled at the grave of the new saint. Minister Plehve, who had changed his faith twice during his lifetime, knelt before Seraphim's bones, shedding tears of childlike emotion. The ornamented pall for the coffin had been embroidered by Prince Putjatin with his own aristocratic fingers. Plehve's tears won for him the unlimited confidence of the Czar, and the embroidery of Prince Putjatin brought him the dignity of Vice-Chief Master of Ceremonics. Other courtiers had dedicated candles and carpets, bells and altars. The brilliant career of many an official and courtier was incepted that day as he prayed piously over Seraphim's bones.

More than three thousand members of the Court and the nobility assembled in Sarov to enjoy a refreshing bath in the holy spring. The sun beat down mercilessly upon the wide steppe. The dry, dusty earth swarmed with thousands of cripples, insane, deaf mutes, maimed and pilgrims. The heavy air was filled with the pious litanies of the psalms. The peasants recounted the miracles of the new saint to one another.

In the burning heat of that August day the Czar strode across the steppe crowded with pilgrims. The afflicted, babbling their prayers, exposed stricken limbs and revolting sores. In the eyes of the people, Czar and saint had merged into a miracle-performing oneness. The maimed and the halt and the blind bowed before the Czar, seeking to catch his glance, and partake of his blessings. A meeting with the Anointed One promised the same miracle as a prayer over the bones of the saint. Nicholas II sensed that here, in the dry steppe of Sarov, he was expected to cast off all human vestiges. He, whom God had anointed, was transformed into one resembling God. And while the courtiers prayed to St. Seraphim for medals and dignities, the Czar dispensed his blessings to the people. The sick and the suffering rejoiced when they caught the eye of the Czar, and presently, before the astonished glances of the Court popes, the wide steppe of Sarov became the scene of an Oriental-pagan mystery.

On the evening of the solemn canonization a gala dinner was given in honour of the imperial couple. The invited courtiers and dignitaries could not fail to observe the red blotches that stained the Czarina's pale face and her unsteady glances roving, absent-mindedly, across the hall. To all appearances her breath was belaboured as if she sought to fight off an overwhelming emotion.

Shortly before midnight the Czarina arose from the table. While the gala dinner continued, Alexandra Feodorovna, accompanied by an elderly lady-in-waiting, walked through the woods to the old spring. Dressed for a Court function she knelt at the holy water. The moon's beams illuminated her face, now raised to Heaven. Her eyelids half-closed, she whispered a fervent prayer. At precisely that moment the high clergy of the country prayed at the grave of the new saint for the same miracle. Even as choirs at the nearby monastery sent their last litanies toward the heavens the Czarina undressed and immersed herself in the miracle-working spring of St. Seraphim.

The nocturnal mystery brought fulfilment. The miracle happened. What no exorcist had been able to accomplish had been granted upon the mediation of a simple Russian saint. Exactly one year after that memorable night, on the 12th of August, 1904, the Czarina bore a son who was christened Alexius. In a solemn meeting the Senate declared the newly born Grandduke Czarevitch and heir to the Russian throne.

All the officials and courtiers who had attended the canonization now rushed to the palace in droves. Similarly, as in the year before at Sarov, the Czar strode through the pious multitude. This time, however, the Emperor not only extended his blessings and gracious glances; the open palms of the courtiers were filled with medals and appointments, with high pensions and other proofs of imperial grace. The same day there was placed on the wall of the Czar's study a large icon of the Holy Seraphim of Sarov, ambassador of His Majesty, the Czar, at the Court of God the Almighty.

A year later the newly appointed Chief Procurator of the Holy

Synod, Prince Obolensky, in a conversation with the Czar, dared to express slight doubts as to St. Seraphim's true holiness. Austerely, the Czar expounded: "As far as the holiness and the miracle of St. Seraphim is concerned, I personally am so strongly convinced of it that nothing and nobody can shake my faith. Why, wasn't I given incontestable proof?"

Through all the convulsions of ensuing years, through wars, revolutions, and exile, Nicholas maintained this firm belief. No misfortune could ever shake it. To the very last he looked with devoted reverence upon the icon of his ambassador at the throne of God.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE FLEA BITE

AUSTERELY, *The Ancient Chronicle* records :  
Mauritius, Emperor of Byzantium, ascended the throne in the year of the Lord 582 and was a good man and a just ruler. His reign was one of splendour for his realm. One day, however, the Emperor committed a grave wrong. His victorious army, after laying Asia waste, was waxing restless and he therefore sent it to do battle in Europe. There misfortune soon overtook it. The army was captured by the Barbarians, a disaster the Emperor himself had brought on by clever scheming. He had refused to dispatch reinforcements to his jeopardized army because, to his mind, his own wanton and rebellious warriors presented a more dangerous threat to him than the savage Barbarians of far countries. Therefore, when the Barbarians demanded high ransom for the captured army, Mauritius indulged in such protractive negotiations that the enraged enemy ultimately slew all their prisoners.

Then the Emperor's conscience began to trouble him. Knowing himself to be responsible for so much bloodshed, he trembled at the thought of the punishment which the Beyond unquestionably held in store for him. In his great anguish, Mauritius sent letters to all the patriarchs, bishops, and holy ascetics. In all humility the remorseful Emperor requested these pious souls to pray to God to let him endure all the suffering awaiting him in the Beyond, while he still dwelled on earth, so that he would be forgiven his sins after death. Accordingly, the entire clergy implored God fervently, in prayers and castigations, for the Emperor's punishment.

The Almighty granted the prayers of the holy Church. A devout ascetic revealed to the Emperor that even a sinner partakes in God's eternal justice. "You will be admitted to eternal happiness," the ascetic said, "however, in the course of your terrestrial life, you shall lose your realm amidst suffering and shame." Overwhelmed with gratitude, the Emperor rushed to the altar of the Lord and, throughout his realm, the pious exulted in the joy of their Emperor.

Presently the warrior Phokas arose against the Emperor, and with him the entire army. Mauritius did nothing to crush the revolt and, eventually, he and his family fell captives to the bloody rebels. Mauritius's seven children were decapitated before his very eyes. As each head rolled in the sand the Emperor cried : "Righteous art Thou, O Almighty, and righteous is Thy judgment." The last of his family, he met his fate bravely. . . .

During the white nights of St. Petersburg, the Czar would thumb the

old, yellowed tome. The words of *The Ancient Chronicle* resounded in his ears like the heavy beats of celestial justice. The golden spire of the Admiralty—landmark of St. Petersburg—loomed outside his window like a giant index finger raised in a gesture of warning.

Thirteen centuries separated the Czar from the Emperor Mauritius who, fearing rebellion, had sent forth his subjects into the wild country of the Barbarians. God's justice had annihilated the entire family of the sinner, who, for the sake of power, had sacrificed his people.

Nicholas put *The Ancient Chronicle* aside. It appeared to him as a strange, unreal saga. There was no comparison whatever between the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias and the iniquitous Emperor Mauritius of old! To be sure he himself had just sent his Christian army against the yellow Barbarians in the Far East. But, of course, there was not one whit of truth in the revolutionaries' calumnies that the Czar had dispatched his army merely to salvage his personal fortune, invested in the Far East; or that Minister of Interior Plehve hoped to stave off revolution by waging a victorious war. Certainly the Czar was neither worried about his Far Eastern investments nor about the revolutionaries. God's own will had pressed the sword into the hand of the Orthodox Emperor, and God's will unquestionably would bring about the victory of a Christian army over a host of heathens.

The Czar pressed his pale face against the cold window-pane. Outside, the wind was churning the snow while the clouds above the Palace Square assumed the shape of spectres. And spectre-like, covered with snow, there now marched across the ice-covered steppes of Manchuria the soldiers the Czar had commanded to war against Japan.

The war which the Czar proclaimed in the White Hall of the Winter Palace, on the 8th of February, 1904, had been planned by Minister of Interior Plehve, in the solitude of his study. During long winter evenings, Plehve studied the reports of his governors, sleuths, and police officials. From these reports he pieced together the picture of a threatening, inescapable danger. With pedantic precision the Minister jotted down the storm warnings of an approaching disaster. His cold eyes glanced over the long roster of terroristic acts. His hand trembled as, time and again, he entered new figures and names. Throughout sleepless nights the Minister drew up the bloody balance of his government:

September, 1903.—Rioting because of the Russification of the Armenian Church in Kars, Baku, Elizabetopol, and Nucha. Railway strike in Borisoglebsk; execution of four revolutionaries in Elizabetopol. Martial law in five cities in Trans-Caucasia. Discovery of a secret arsenal in Ufa.

October, 1903.—Assassination of the President of the Court of Ufa. Severe injuries suffered by the Stadtholder in the Caucasus, Prince Golizyn. Martial law in the north-western governments. Strike in Reval. Bomb explosion in Riga.

November, 1903.—Assassination of the President of Police of

Bjalostok. Peasant revolt in the Governments of Charkov and Pskov. Student revolts in Kiev. Unrest in Nicolaievsk and Bachmet. Anti-governmental demonstrations in Charkov. Execution of two terrorists in Cherson.

December, 1903.—Student unrest in Warsaw and Charkov. Peasant revolts in the southern Governments.

January, 1904.—Assassination of Baron Korff, Governor of Lomja, and of the President of Police of Kiev.

Plehve's eyes narrowed. The light in his study seemed suddenly dim. He stepped to the window. Down below he observed a secret-service man walking back and forth. An armoured coach was awaiting him in front of his house. For some time now whenever the Minister made a date for the following day it had become his custom to add melancholically: ". . . provided I am still alive."

To Plehve, the only way out of the labyrinth of inner political difficulties was a short but victorious war. To his mind, the flutter of the flags would drown the grumblings of the dissatisfied. The heroism of the army would win the throne anew for the monarch before the eyes of all sceptics; before the triumphal march of the victorious army through the streets of St. Petersburg, the phantom of a revolution would flounder and crash to the ground. Because he knew the Czar's character so well, the Minister decided upon the Far East as the object of a foreign-political victory over an inner-political enemy.

The soul of Nicholas II was imbued with a mystic love for the Far Eastern regions of his realm. To him the core of Russia's power did not spring from the narrow confines of the European west, but was anchored in the endless expanse of the Orient. It was the Far East which held the future glory of his realm, and it was the Siberian peasantry who were best equipped to lay the pagan world of the Orient at the feet of the Christian Czar. Thus, new laurels would enhance the brilliant crown of Russian absolutism.

Korea, Manchuria, Tibet—calm, distant countries, crowded with strange secrets and enticing goals—lured the Czar. Indeed these magical worlds seemed to be actually waiting for the Czar's sesame. After the Chino-Japanese War, when the Celestials relinquished the peninsula of Kuantun to the Japanese, in the peace treaty of Shimono-seki, one word from the Czar sufficed to induce Japan to renounce meekly all the spoils of a victorious war, and to evacuate the occupied territory. Again, one word from Russia's mighty monarch resulted in the Chinese relinquishing the regained peninsula to the Russians. A frown on the part of her Emperor not only won Manchuria for Russia, but the Chinese railway as well. When, at last, the Chinese arose in rebellion and the Boxer revolt shook the Celestial Empire, the Czar, co-operating with the Western Powers, dispatched his brave General Linevitch to China. To the beat of resounding marches, the Czar's army entered the holy city of Peking, sacked the palaces, drove out the Son of Heaven, and hoisted the Russian flag over the quiet pagodas of the yellow imperium.

Crushed, humiliated, the Orient now lay prostrate before the Czar. Russian generals ruled at the Court of the Emperor of Korea ; Russian troops constructed the Manchurian railway ; Russian engineers built the fortifications of Port Arthur, in the very heart of China. Even the German Kaiser acknowledged Russian supremacy in the Far East, in his famous telegram to the Czar : " The admiral of the Atlantic sends greetings to the admiral of the Pacific."

Immersed in dreams and visions, the yellow race was dormant. No word nor untoward breath stirred the quiet solemnity of the yellow palaces. But within the walls of these palaces, monasteries, and castles secret flames flared. Unnoticed by the outside world, the yellow peoples armed for a gigantic battle against their century-old enemy. As in the time of Genghis Khan, in the time of Baty and Tamerlane, the Russian peoples were the first to encounter the mighty wrath of the yellow race.

It was the Japanese who, at the close of the nineteenth century, assumed leadership of the yellow race. The Empire of the Rising Sun won its first victory over the world of the white race on the 13th of April, 1898, when Russia and Japan signed their Far East Agreement. According to its stipulations, Russia withdrew her generals from Korea, leaving the country to the unrestricted influence of Japan ; in exchange, Russia received full sovereignty over Kuantun, Ljaoan, and Manchuria.

Only under the pressure of his ministers had the Czar signed the agreement ; in Court circles, the imperial dissatisfaction was automatically endowed with the force of law. Assiduously, the courtiers observed every frown, every hint, and every word of the Czar. The error committed by weak and reckless ministers would be set aright by the true devotion of the Court clique as speedily as possible.

Presently, there appeared among the courtiers the slant-eyed Captain Besobrasov of the Cavaliers' Guard. Imbued with fervent loyalty to the Emperor, the Captain proposed a plan for the peaceful penetration of Korea. Just as Hastings had won India for the English crown, so a Russian commercial organization, in the course of a peaceful capitalistic development of Korea, was to change this country into a Russian colony, gradually and unobtrusively. The proposed emulation of Hastings' strategy on the part of the good Captain received great acclaim. A speedily organized concern secured forest and gold concessions along the banks of the Korean river Yalu and elected Grandduke Michailovitch president of the company. Court circles promptly subscribed large sums for the enterprise. It was rumoured that even the Czar himself was an investor.

All the warnings, which subsequently reached the Czar's desk, not to antagonize the Japanese, proved unavailing. Still vivid in his memory was the affront he had suffered at the hands of a Japanese policeman on the shores of Biwa Lake, when visiting there as Grandduke-Czarevitch. In sheer desperation the gigantic Witte threatened to resign. He was assigned to the innocuous post of a President of the

Ministers' Committee and thus rendered helpless. In vain, too, the intelligent Mme Besobrasov complained in the *salons* of the capital: "I cannot understand how my husband can be permitted to play such an important role. Can't anybody see he is practically crazy?"

However, in a gesture as surprising as it was spectacular, Besobrasov was appointed Secretary of State in proof of the imperial favour he was enjoying. At the same time Japan dispatched her greatest statesman, Prince Ito, to St. Petersburg to propose a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The Mikado's emissary was received with significant coolness.

And yet the Czar really did not want war. In the deepest recesses of his heart, Nicholas II was convinced that this time, too, the word of the Czar would suffice to bring a small Oriental nation to reason. On the eve of the war he conversed with Grandduke Alexander, who was opposed to war.

"There is talk among the people of an imminent war," the Grandduke ventured.

"There is no reason whatever to talk of war," the Czar replied coolly.

"But how can you avoid war if you won't give in?"

"Believe me, the Japanese will not declare war on us."

"And if they do?"

"They wouldn't dare!"

"But if they dare just the same?"

"You know, you are boring me, Sandro. I assure you I have no intention of going to war with Japan or anybody else."

The day after this conversation Russia's fate was sealed. With Witte out of the way, it did not prove difficult for Plehve to press the sword into the hand of the Czar. When, on the 6th of February, 1904, the Japanese broke off negotiations with Russia and attacked the Russian fleet in Port Arthur, inflicting serious losses, the Czar declared war. The words with which Europe, at the threshold of the century, inaugurated its battle against Asia, sounded solemn indeed: "Unshaken in Our faith in assistance from the Almighty, and in the firm conviction that all Our loyal subjects will rise together with Us in the fight for the homeland, We invoke God's blessing for Our army."

The Czar referred to the Japanese surprise attack on Port Arthur as a "flea bite." And all Russia repeated the words of the Minister of War that it would suffice for the Russian soldiers to throw their caps over the Japanese; it was inevitable that the little monkeys would smother under the burden.

The Czar met the bayonets of the Japanese with the magic power of his blessings. In his special train, Nicholas II travelled through his country. As interminably as eternity, Russian steppes stretched before his eyes. Regiment after regiment marched past him with fixed bayonets. In small God-forsaken villages in the Ural Mountains, along the Volga, and on the Kama, the Czar alighted from his coach. Astride a charger, he reviewed his troops, destined for an early death.

In mystical ecstasy the bearded *mushiks* stared at their Czar. Tears welled up in the eyes of the soldiers when the slim hand of the Anointed One was raised over them in imperial blessing. In pious humility, the Asiatic regiments sank to their knees. And while the Czar—a mystic image of God—rode through their prostrate rows, his words of blessing were received in prayerful silence. Surveying the kneeling host, the Czar distributed small icons of the Holy Seraphim of Sarov. Uncertain whether their devotion belonged to the visible hand of their Czar or the invisible grace of this saint, the *mushiks* kissed the icons passionately.

The Czar's special train travelled mile after mile. A million peasants passed before the monarch's eyes. In the neighbourhood of the city of Slatoust, where a signpost announced "Europe—Asia," a brilliant parade was held for the Czar in a wide valley. The rays of the sun, rising behind the Asiatic mountains, fell full upon the monarch's head. Bathed in gleaming gold, he resembled one of the old Muscovite granddukes resisting another onslaught of the fierce Tatar with all the religious fervour of his army.

Liberal equipped with icons and blessings, the army marched towards Manchuria. Tirelessly the Czar's special train travelled through the country; tirelessly the Czar distributed icons. In Riga, as a special sign of highest imperial grace, Nicholas II lifted up the little Czarevitch, so that the army might gaze upon the heir to the throne. And with his tiny hand, Alexius sent the army on its way, fortified with miniature icons of Holy Seraphim.

In the aristocratic *salons* of the capital city the devout ministrations of the Czar were received sneeringly. The sophisticated burghers were amused by the Emperor's piety, and all over St. Petersburg, General Dragomirov's witticism was repeated: "The Japanese fight us with canons, and we fight them with icons."

With suppressed satisfaction, the Liberals gloated over the fact that the *mushiks* were sent into Manchuria merely to salvage the millions which Emperor and granddukes had invested there. At the same time the terrorists were delighted to welcome Japanese delegates who furnished them with money for their fight against the Czarist Government. The whole of subterranean Russia joyfully anticipated the defeat of the imperial army.

Admiral Alexeiev, the Czar's viceroy in the Far East, had been appointed commander over one million soldiers. The Admiral—a diplomat with navy training—had hardly seen more than a full platoon of infantry before, except, perchance, on the parade grounds. But since victory rested in the hands of God and was no matter of terrestrial generalship, the Czar believed this loyal official would prove to be an effective tool.

When the first month of the war had demonstrated Alexeiev's complete inefficiency, the Czar dispatched his former Minister of War, General Kuropatkin, to the front without, however, recalling the Admiral. Kuropatkin was a wise and brave general, imbued with the



F.N.I

THE "LITTLE FATHER" WITH HIS SON  
the most popular picture of the Czar, in the uniform of a private soldier,  
and Czarivitch that was ever taken



soul of a drum-major. He travelled to the front like a victor in a triumphal march. Icons, prayers of thanks, joyous huzzas accompanied him all along the route. However, all the prayers of village popes could not counteract the grave transgression of the most fundamental rule in the conduct of war: a split command, with the army subjected to rivalry between two leaders. Whenever Alexeiev demanded a bold offensive, Kuropatkin ordered a strategic retreat. At the same time they inundated the Czar with divergent war plans, strategic suggestions and mutual incriminations.

Seldom had troops been sent to war as unprepared as the Russian. Underestimating their opponent to an unbelievable extent, the Czar's generals had neglected the most essential measures. Long years of peace had dulled the Muscovite sword. The obsolete ordnance of the Russian fleet was far inferior to the Japanese artillery, especially where range was concerned. Many of the Russian heavy pieces lacked locks; millions of rounds of ammunition did not fit the rifles.

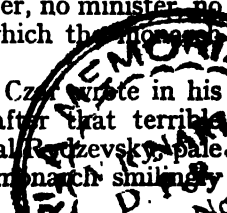
On the 31st of March a Japanese mine sunk the Russian flagship *Petropavlovsk* with Admiral Makarov, Supreme Commander of the Far Eastern fleet, aboard. This loss was the first of a long series of similar misfortunes which now befell the Czar with all the implacable fury of an avalanche.

On the 18th of April the Japanese defeated the Russian troops in the Battle of Turentshen. On the 28th of April the Japanese landed in Bitsivo, subsequently laying siege to Port Arthur. On the 28th of May they emerged as victors in the sea battle of Port Arthur. On the 25th of August the Russians lost the seven-day battle of Liao-Yang. On the 22nd of December Port Arthur capitulated. On the 25th of February, 1905, the Russians lost an important battle at Mukden and, on the 27th of May, Admiral Togo destroyed practically the entire czarist fleet in the Battle of Tsushima. Russia had lost the war!

More than half a million corpses were strewn over Manchuria. Secluded in Czarskoje Selo, the Czar studied the humiliating reports of the defeats, retreats and terrific losses of his troops. Vacantly he stared into the distance.

Wan and fearful, the courtiers looked for signs of a spiritual collapse. Their compassionate and submissive glances caressed the monarch. Everybody stood ready to console the Czar, but to all appearances, Nicholas did not desire the consolation his subjects were so anxious to accord him. He had inherited his unshakable poise from more robust forebears. Words of sympathy died on the lips of the courtiers as they gazed upon their ever-amiable Czar. Nicholas regarded the loss of the war as his own private, imperial business; no courtier, no minister, no general had the right to intrude upon an affair which the monarch considered strictly personal.

The day the cruiser *Petropavlovsk* was sunk the Czar wrote in his diary: "I could hardly regain my composure after that terrible disaster." However, on that same day, when General Rodzevsky, pale, and distraught, entered the Czar's chamber, the monarch smilingly



took him by the arm and led him over to the window. Pointing to the snow flurries, he remarked : " Look at the weather. Wouldn't it be just the day for hunting ? Do you realize that we two have not gone hunting for a long time ? What day is this ? Friday ? Well, let's go to-morrow." Still shaken, the General descended the wide staircase half an hour later, to observe the Emperor, surrounded by his entire entourage, indulging in a little crow-shooting.

A few months thereafter the aide-de-camp, who brought the Czar the telegram advising him of the defeat at Mukden, found the monarch engaged in a game of tennis. Nicholas politely excused himself, read the telegram without undue haste, pocketed it, and continued the game with calm, unchanged mien. Evidently a lost battle could not deter him from winning a tennis match.

On the 27th of May, 1905, a great gala dinner was held at the Court. It was the ninth anniversary of the Czar's coronation at Moscow. While the banquet was in progress a courier of the Minister of the Navy arrived and handed the Emperor a telegram. Opening it, Nicholas read the short report informing him of the loss of his entire fleet. He refolded the telegram, drew out his gold cigarette case, and had the Chief Master of Ceremonies announce to the guests : " His Imperial Majesty permits smoking." Upon observing the Czar puffing away nonchalantly, none of the guests could divine that, at that very moment, the monarch had buried the fondest hopes of his life.

To be sure, that night, when he was alone in his bedroom, the Czar wrote into his diary : " My soul is weary. Everything is unspeakably difficult and sad."

But while the courtiers, their surprise increasing, admired the Czar's stoicism ; while the Liberal circles interpreted it as the cold indifference of a degenerate ; while the war museum in Tokio was overflowing with icons of Holy Seraphim ; and while the beaten armies came straggling back across Siberia, revolutionary pamphlets appeared throughout Russia. Shots of the terrorists reverberated and torches were applied to many old estates of the nobles. The forbidding phantom of revolution arose ominously in every corner of the vast realm.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE CUP

A HEAVY-SET man with dark, dismal eyes and thick lips, a black moustache and fleshy hands, had been appointed executor of death sentences pronounced against ministers, generals and governors by the executive committee of the Social-Revolutionary Party. This stocky individual received from the party the names of the condemned as well as the necessary funds for their destruction. Like an autocrat of unlimited prerogatives, he ruled over the notorious "Bo," secret organization of bomb-throwers, terrorists, and murderers. He was an engineer by the name of Evno Asev.

A dark-skinned, stoutish man, perpetually perspiring and ill-mannered, had been chosen by Minister Plehve as leader of the defence against the terrorists. His requests for money were never-ending, but through him Plehve received information of planned assassinations, including the names of the conspirators, and a description of all their meeting-places. This most formidable opponents of the "Bo" was an engineer by the name of Evno Asev.

In the apocalyptic figure of this notorious informer, the snares laid by Plehve, and those prepared by the Social-Revolutionaries, interlocked. Holding the entire spectral fabric of plots and counter-plots in the hollow of his hand, versatile Asev, with the cunning and equanimity of a spider, caught granddukes and terrorists, generals and murderers in the meshes of his web.

Russia's history of assassinations and counter-assassinations was mirrored in Asev's strangely distorted soul. He regarded the maintenance of a certain balance between the two factions as his ordained task. The greater the number of revolutionaries he betrayed, the easier it was for him to expose a governor or perhaps, now and then, a general to the death-dealing weapons of the "Bo." While, on one hand, the revolutionaries sought to overthrow the Government with Asev's assistance Plehve, on the other hand, hoped that Asev's valuable co-operation would enable him to tighten his grip on the reins of his system.

Plehve looked upon the peasants, workers and intellectuals as enemies of his regime. Although the peasantry was scattered all over the vast country and was completely unorganized, they nevertheless were the deciding factor because their number ran into the millions. That the peasantry desired the abolition of the *obshchina* was considered revolutionary by Plehve. For many years past a governmental Committee for the Investigation of the Agrarian Problem had been

functioning under the chairmanship of Witte. When 592 out of 600 local committees of this commission had demanded that the *obshtshina* be abolished, Plehve, on the 26th of February, 1904, had succeeded in inducing the Czar to dissolve the Committee and to enact more stringent agrarian laws. At the same time that hundreds of thousands of *mushiks* were sent to war in Manchuria, individual members of the Committee were sent into exile. The result of Plehve's ill-considered measure was the gigantic, bloody peasant revolt which shook Russia to her very depths the following year.

Plehve's attention, however, was less directed to the unorganized and scattered peasants than to those three million industrial workers upon whom the Minister looked as the logical advance guard of the revolution. Just as Asev undertook the physical destruction of the revolutionaries, Subatov, an agent of the *okhrana*—secret league for the protection of the Czar—assumed the task of curbing the rebellious spirit of the labourers.

Subatov was one of the cleverest and best-educated Russian police agents. His idea of organizing labour was not devoid of a certain social foundation. The *okhrana* agent believed it was much more important to protect the monarchical order than to protect the Russian factory owners who frequently donated considerable sums to the Liberal movements of the *bourgeoisie*. Subatov decided that, under the auspices of the police, a workers' organization should be arrayed against the secret Socialist labour organizations. Subsequently, his officious organization—similar to Socialist groups—fought capitalism. This was not done, however, in preparation for a Socialist state of the future, but solely to defend monarchical-Christian justice within the borders of the Empire.

Under Plehve's protection Subatov founded, first in Moscow, then in many other cities, workers' organizations and clubs. In their rooms, and in the presence of well-meaning generals, capitalism was damned and declarations of loyalty telegraphed to the Czar. The result of these measures was tremendous. But Plehve, as well as Subatov, overlooked the all-important fact that, for the first time in Russia, through their own endeavours, a cup was being fashioned which, once grasped firmly in the labourer's hand, was very likely to overflow with blood.

However, all schemes to control the peasants and gain the confidence of the workers proved powerless to stem the rising revolutionary tide. Plehve, recognizing as much, said sadly: "We are facing a revolution and only I see it."

With all the fury of enraged berserks, uprooted Russian intelligentsia launched onslaught after onslaught against the stronghold of absolutism. "Intelligentsia? Why, the Academy should be told to strike this word out of the Russian lexicon!" the Czar once remarked. In reply, the world of intellectuals displayed bitter hatred against the phenomenon of czarist rule which, intrinsically, was completely beyond their comprehension.

To the intelligentsia the defeats of the imperial army at the hands of the Japanese appeared as the first sign of blessings to come. In spring, 1904, the intelligentsia shouted for Western Liberalism throughout the country, on all possible occasions. At a medical congress in St. Petersburg it was expounded that only full freedom of speech, Press, and assembly would make it possible to fight syphilis and tuberculosis effectively. Teachers, convening in Moscow, maintained that instruction in Latin was practical only in a country with constitutional government. The committee of an all-Russian cattle show at Charkov felt obliged to declare that czarist despotism interfered with "the raising of Russian cattle of pure strain."

Such millionaires as Morosov, Malzev, and Tereshitshenko spent enormous amounts for the support of the revolution. In Odessa the rabble built barricades while bloody unrest stalked the border provinces. Governors and police fell victim to the revolvers of the "Bo." At the same time, all Liberal Russia greeted with diabolical laughter the declaration of Father John of Kronstadt, that the Bible was the only suitable constitution for Holy Russia.

In the midst of this growing decline of imperial ideology, Asev, pressed by the revolutionaries, decided to have his employer, Plehve, assassinated. Since the secret shops of the revolutionaries were unable to produce a bomb powerful enough to shatter the Minister's steel-armoured coach, the instrument of death was constructed of especially potent explosives at the governmental Pyrotechnical Institute. Informed that the bomb would be used against the terrorists, Plehve signed an order for it with his own hand and eventually the police themselves delivered the petard to Asev.

On the 15th of July, 1904, Plehve stuffed a sheaf of papers into his brief-case for the last time. At Baltic Station the train that was to take him to Czarskoje Selo awaited him. Plehve's bloodless lips were twisted into a cynical smile. His dry hands, marked with blue veins, fondled the brief-case containing explicit reports. These, supported by many letters, were to prove to the Czar that Secretary of State Witte, chairman of the Ministers' Committee, was the real leader and instigator of all revolutionary excesses.

The train for Czarskoje Selo left without Plehve. His brief-case never reached the desk of the Czar. As Plehve's carriage, surrounded by secret police, neared Baltic Station, a wild-eyed, cadaverous man rushed forward, his hands flung high. Startled, the horses drawing Plehve's carriage reared. Before the driver had a chance to rein in the team the man threw a small object in front of the wheels. Aghast, Plehve gazed from the window of his steel-armoured vehicle. For the fraction of a moment, his eyes and those of the assassin met.

Never—even to his very end—could student Sazonov forget the greenish eyes of Plehve. Filled with fathomless fear, they had suddenly hardened into a vacant stare. The murderer Sazonov was not hanged because Russian law, at that time, provided no death penalty for the assassination of a minister. But even in his cell in a Siberian prison

where he was found hanged, seven years later, Sazonov was haunted continuously by the fear-dilated eyes of his victim.

The Liberal Count Sviatopolk-Mirski became Plehve's successor. The Count had no intention of continuing along the same road which had brought death to his predecessors, Sipjagin and Plehve. In his first interview with the Press, he explained that "mutual confidence must be the corner-stone of the relations between the Government and the public," and that he "firmly believed in the wisdom of public opinion." To the surprise of officials who had been appointed by Plehve, numerous exiled intellectuals were brought back from Siberia and, in St. Petersburg, a Liberal congress was permitted to condemn bloody Czardom openly. The new minister submitted a draft to the Czar in November, 1904, proposing the grant of numerous progressive liberties, also providing for a representative body to be called "Duma" which was to advise the Czar and ministers in their legislative labours.

In a conference of the highest dignitaries of the realm, under the chairmanship of the Czar, Sviatopolk-Mirski's suggestions were discussed in detail. All the ministers, with the exception of Pobedonostsev, were in favour of the reform. To be sure the bombs of the terrorists, which invisibly threatened every one of the ministers, influenced the opinion of these dignitaries. At the end of the meeting, when the Czar commanded Witte to submit the draft of a Liberal ukase to him, the proposal was accepted with acclaim. Great excitement was discernible among the dignitaries. To all appearances, here was the beginning of a new era with the sun of absolutism setting behind the clouds of Liberal thought. Deeply stirred, the ministers regarded their Czar whose mere word sufficed to steer the jeopardized ship of state into other and calmer waters.

A few days later a draft "for measures improving the organization of the Government" was submitted to the Czar. On the morning of the 11th of December, Witte received word to be at Czarskoje Selo, that evening for a private conference with Nicholas.

The dim light in the imperial study fell upon three figures. Beside the frail Czar, Witte's gigantic form was ensconced in a large chair. The third member of the trio was Grandduke Sergius. His mad, blue eyes studied the Minister. The Grandduke's blond beard framed his face much as the gold of Old Masters framed the pictures of the Moscovite czars.

In the silence of the room the Czar's words tinkled like the silver chimes of a wall-clock. He thumbed Witte's draft with his slender hands. It was the ninth point, providing for admission of representatives of the people to the State Council, which aroused the doubts of the Emperor and Autocrat. Witte, looking down upon the Czar with a supercilious smile, felt no hesitation about offering his master the bitter cup of truth. With merciless candour, he explained to the Czar what all his ministers and courtiers assiduously tried to hide from him. Doubtless, admission of popular representatives to the State Council was nothing but a prologue to a constitution. But then, the Minister

explained with cool detachment, there were but two ways open to the Government in future : Either a gradual and inevitable renunciation of autocratic rule ; or else rigid adherence to old concepts.

The Czar's face darkened ; he looked at his robust uncle anxiously. In Sergius's eyes glowed the icy fire of a man obsessed. Somehow, the face of his domineering uncle reminded the Czar of the fierce visage of the cruel Ivan. Ivan the Terrible, too, in times of stress, had convened representatives of his people in the so-called "*Zemsky Sobor*"—National Assembly—to take council with him. The deputies had knelt before Ivan as if before an incarnated icon to receive, humbly and piously, the commands of the Anointed One.

"What would you think of convening a '*Zemsky-Sobor*' ?" Nicholas asked.

Witte laughed scornfully. "Your Majesty, I am afraid this venerable atavism could not be disinterred from the past."

There was a gleam in Grandduke Sergius's eyes. He stroked his beard. To the Grandduke's mind even Ivan the Terrible had been a dangerous Liberal !

The Czar's face assumed a resolute expression now. Quietly, decisively, his words came : "No, I shall never be a party to the introduction of a constitutional form of government. I am convinced it would only be harmful to the Russian people who are entrusted to me by God. For that reason, then, I strike out this point."

The next day saw the famous ukase of the 12th of December, 1904, published, sealing the departure of the Czar from the policies of his father. Nicholas stated : "In conformity with the holy legacy of Our crowned forebears and steadily dedicated to the weal of the people entrusted to Us by God, and on the basis of the indestructible foundations of the laws of the realm, We consider everlasting solicitude for the needs of Our country and clear differentiation between that which will serve the Russian people and that which will harm them, the task of Our Government . . ."

Eight points followed in which religious tolerance, extension of autonomy and a greater freedom of the Press was promised. The ninth point, providing for the moderation of absolutism, was missing.

Hardly a single point of the ukase of the 12th of December was ever realized. With a losing war being fought in the Far East, the chaotic days of 1905 approached—days in which the blood of the Czar's subjects spattered the imperial ermine like a fiery flood sweeping along all the plans, ukases, and measures of pre-revolutionary days.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### RED SUNDAY

**O**N the 22nd of January, 1905, the bond between Russia and the Czar was severed.

The rifles of a company of Semionovzy and the heavy swords of the cuirassiers of the Guard, left a broad and bloody track in the white snow of St. Petersburg. In the background arose the massive outline of the Winter Palace. A cordon of troops surrounded the Czar's residence not unlike an iron vice forged around the coffin of czarist power.

On the evening of the 22nd of January, under the snow in the squares of St. Petersburg, love for the god-like Czar was buried forever. Until then, the countenance of Little Father Czar had seemed to be casting the soft glow of super-mundane light over his Christian people. But on the 22nd of January this glow gave way to the blood-red rays of imperial wrath. Before the eyes of a deeply moved people, the soft features of a saint were transformed into the fiery face of a stern imperator, meting out punishment.

On the eve of Red Sunday there were strange occurrences in the city of St. Petersburg. At six o'clock in the evening, a genial Police Captain emerged from the station house on Nevsky Prospect. In the twilight of the evening he observed a curious scene. An enormous multitude had gathered. On the balcony of a house, on the opposite side of the street, stood a tall man in priestly garb, a large golden cross on his chest. The fluttering beard, the long black hair, and the glowing eyes of the pope recalled pictures of old ascetics. In a thundering voice he reviled the Czar and fed the excited crowd with revolutionary slogans. The people acclaimed the demagogic pope in joyous frenzy.

The Police Captain became greatly agitated as he viewed this disturbing scene and promptly telephoned to the City Commandant of St. Petersburg, General Fullon.

"Your Excellency," the Captain reported fairly spluttering, "the pope, George Gapon, is blaspheming the Czar, indulging in revolutionary addresses directly opposite the police station. I think something ought to be done about it. Does Your Excellency order the arrest of Gapon?"

From the other end of the wire came the tired, somewhat lisping words of the General: "It is my order that Gapon be left alone. Don't do anything. Let him go on talking."

The Captain replaced the receiver. From the windows of the police station he watched the fluttering beard of the pope. He shook his head disconsolately. His Excellency certainly was playing a dangerous game. A man of experience, the Police Captain did not doubt for

a single moment that the revolutionary pope was in the pay of the police.

Pope Gapon was the first to pour the heady red wine of revolution into the cups of labour, organized under the auspices of the police, in accordance with Subatov's formula. Once a simple prison chaplain, as soon as Gapon had entered the service of Plehve he had become an assiduous organizer of the labourers' clubs through which the Minister had tried to curb growing Radicalism. Gapon was vacillating and high-strung. Balancing precariously on the narrow bridge of provocation, he was overcome by dizziness, so to speak. True enough, he received a salary from Plehve, but the acclaim with which the labourers received his Socialistic speeches could not but go to his head. God and Czar, Christianity and Socialism, greed for possessions and greed for glory, intermingled in the pope's soul into an abstruse oneness. Even while his police service assuaged his greed, he felt it was no more than the duty of the Christian labourers to bear a pious pope on their shoulders to the throne of the Orthodox Czar, so that a touch of Socialist red might be added to the brilliancy of the crown.

In the suburbs of St. Petersburg, and in the quarters of the labourers, the pope was accorded all the honours of a demigod. His stirring speeches, generously sprinkled with quotations from the Bible as well as with Marxian slogans, made a tremendous impression on the souls of the workers. Their inherent fealty to Little Father Czar was strongly blended with a fervent hope for necessary social reforms. With the calmness of purchasers who have assured themselves of the possession of something worthwhile by paying the price for it, the police watched the pope's progress. City Commandant Fullon attended many of the labourers' meetings in full uniform, listening to the pope's Monarchistic-Socialistic effusions with condescending mien. Even when Socialism gradually began to triumph over fealty to the Czar, Fullon reported to the Minister of Interior that Gapon's speeches were certain to prove a very useful safety valve on the steam-boiler of revolutionary thought. The simple general never conceived the idea that, one day, the ambitious pope might shut off the safety valve with his own hands, thus exploding the overcharged steam-boiler of revolt.

The watchfulness of the authorities remained passive even when Gapon conceived the plan of a pilgrimage to the throne of the Czar. On behalf of all the workers of St. Petersburg, the pope proposed to submit their humble supplications to the Little Father of the country. Indeed, the well-intentioned police officers had already made plans to line up the battalions of labourers with military precision. A few days prior to the 22nd of January, police officials distributed pictures of the Czar and Russian flags among the workers. Not before the very last minute did the authorities ask the pope to submit the text of the petition to be presented to the Czar. With a triumphant smile, Gapon handed his petition to the Minister.

"Ruler!" it read. "We workers and inhabitants of the city of

St. Petersburg, our women, children, and old people are appealing to you to find protection and truth. . . .” The long pathetic address closed with the pleas and proposals of the workers. They asked for a parliament, and a responsible ministry. They also petitioned for the expropriation of the large estates of the nobility, for a general amnesty, for the separation of the Church from the State, for the introduction of workers’ councils, and many other privileges. In the past, each of these brazen requests would have sufficed to send the petitioner to Siberia.

As they studied the petition, the Minister and the City Commandant felt as if an abyss yawned before them. Their first thought was to prohibit the procession and to arrest the crazed pope. However, with the boldness of a man venturing his all, Gapon sneered at them. On the evening of the 21st of January, 1905, he ruled the streets of St. Petersburg.

Gazing upon the tremendous host of workers, the pope believed he had been sent by Heaven to save Russia. Who knew but on the morrow, borne on the shoulders of the workers, he might move into the imperial palace? Like an archangel, standing at the right of God, his place would be at the right of the Czar’s throne. The pope’s head swam intoxicated by the sound of his own words, he rushed headlong into world history like a runaway horse.

A council, quickly convened by the Minister, decided not to interfere with the procession but also not to permit the mob to advance to the Winter Palace or to congest any of the larger squares of the city. During the night, rounds of ammunition were hurriedly distributed in the barracks, ambulances, and hospitals put in readiness, and the troops of the Guard kept on the alert. When on Sunday, the 22nd of January, the sun shone feebly over the drab streets of the capital, all the important thoroughfares of the city were held by the Semionovzy regiments, horse guards, cuirassiers, and cossacks.

A reddish glow coloured the dirty, snow-laden streets of the city; dull clouds brooded overhead in the Finnish sky. The houses of the workers stretched along the quays of the St. Petersburg islands in a grey, desolate line. Early in the morning a festively garbed crowd filled the streets. For the first time in their history the people were on a pilgrimage to their Czar. Above the multitude fluttered imperial flags, Byzantine crosses, and holy pictures galore.

“The crowd resembled an autumnal ocean wave, churned up by the first gusts of an approaching storm. They pushed forward slowly. The grey faces of the people were like the drab, foaming crests of waves. Their eyes flashed with excitement and they gazed at one another as if they did not really believe in their resolution and were surprised at themselves. Their words soared above the multitude like small grey birds. . . . It was ‘he’ who was talked of mostly. They sought to convince each other that ‘he,’ the Good One, the Righteous, would understand everything, everything.” Thus, Maxim Gorki describes the morning of the 22nd of January.

The people moved slowly across Nevsky Prospect. Mute wistfulness was mirrored in their faces. As children crowd around a father, they crowded around pictures of the Czar. Ahead of them, garbed in flowing priestly vestments, appearing like a storm-swept cloud, strode Gapon, carrying a huge Byzantine cross. A strange silence held the multitude. In their stolid demeanour the crowd resembled the Czar's coronation guests at Chodinsky Field. Following their vision of a beneficent and imperial demi-god, the closer the people approached the palace, the more excited they grew. From innumerable flags the Czar's mild face graciously looked down upon the throng. Like chimes from a church, songs now re-echoed through the streets. With outstretched hands, the workers ponderously advanced toward the palace like some gigantic pre-diluvian beast.

Presently, a chain of fixed bayonets blocked the way. The soldiers' faces were drawn and tense ; since four in the morning they had been awaiting this moment. Their eyes and their hands assumed the steely, mechanical movements of an automaton. The broad cheekbones of the cossacks were tinged blue from the frost. The countenance of their commanding officer bespoke apprehension. The blue steel of his sword flashed ominously before the startled eyes of the multitude.

" Stop, or we fire ! " an officer warned.

The pope waved the huge Byzantine cross excitedly. Nobody would block the road to the Czar ! Nobody would dare to shoot at the Czar's pictures ! The crowd pressed forward.

With a curious clatter the soldiers raised their rifles to their shoulders. Words of command rang out hoarsely. Shuddering fear lurked in the eyes of soldiers and people alike. Only a few steps separated them from one another. Then, choked with excitement, the shout of the commanding officer came : " Fire ! "

That very moment sealed the fate of Nicholas II.

Wild panic seized the multitude. Women and children sank to the ground, bathed in blood. Like the gate to Inferno, the ranks of the soldiers opened. And through this gate cossacks pressed forward on small horses, long of mane ; the scimitars of the cossacks reflected the dull rays of the sun. Immediately the side streets were packed with fleeing men and women. Tracks of blood marked the direction in which they had fled. The cossacks galloped through the streets, rending the air with blood-curdling war-cries.

And there, in the streets, dragged through the grimy, blood-stained snow, drilled by the bullets of his own soldiers, trampled upon by the horses of his own cossacks—there, in all the mire, lay the torn pictures of Nicholas II Alexandrovitch, Czar and Autocrat of All the Russias.

Two hundred corpses covered the streets and squares of the city, but the body of the pope was not among them. Gapon had fled before the scimitars of the cossacks, by way of dark backyards and alleys.

On the evening of the 22nd of January, the poet, Maxim Gorki,

appeared in a hall before a tremendous audience. This time he did not read novels, nor was he prepared to give a literary lecture. Instead, he led the pope Gapon to the rostrum. The Liberal element of St. Petersburg received him with jubilant acclaim. Gapon's face was distorted with poisonous hatred. The old calculated blasphemies against the Czar, in which he formerly had indulged with the police's approval, now became genuinely felt imprecations against the Anointed One. In the thunderous voice of a prophet, he shouted to the audience : " Dear blood brethren, the bullets of the imperial soldiers have killed our faith in the Czar. Let's take vengeance on him and his entire family. Vengeance on all his ministers and all the exploiters of Russian soil. Go, pillage the imperial palaces ! All the soldiers and officers who killed our innocent wives and children, all the tyrants, all the oppressors of the Russian people I herewith smite with my priestly curse."

Gapon fled during the night to a foreign country, but life in exile soon proved tiresome. He returned to St. Petersburg, but neither Siberia nor prison awaited him. The police stood by their agent faithfully. From the Minister of Police, Gapon received a thick roll of banknotes so that, once more, he might carry the spirit of revolution—as approved by the police—into the workers' midst. Eventually the revolutionaries discovered the real reason for Gapon's enthusiastic fight for their cause. To him they were merely tools to further his own ends. On the 6th of April, 1906, Gapon was induced to enter a little villa in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg and there he was strangled by his one-time comrades. Before long, he was completely forgotten.

The 22nd of January, 1905, however, never was to be forgotten by the Russian people. Like the bloody catastrophe on Chodinsky Field, Red Sunday overshadowed the entire reign of Nicholas II, symbolizing tragedy. It was on the 22nd of January, 1905, that the people separated themselves from their Czar. The separation hurt. The reverberations of the shots fired in St. Petersburg were heard throughout the country. In every city, in every factory, the intellectuals and the workers spoke of the Bloody Czar. Had he not greeted his subjects with rifles and scimitars when, on their humble pilgrimage to him, they had been armed only with icons and pictures of their monarch ?

Following his usual custom, the Czar spent the 22nd of January in Czarskoje Selo. Not before evening was he told by his Minister of the Interior that a socialistically minded pope, by the name of Gapon, had incited the workers to the point of rebellion, but the police immediately had embarked upon measures to maintain order. Nobody told Nicholas II of the icons, of the ecclesiastical chants, of the Byzantine crosses, swaying over the multitude, in their pilgrimage to the Czar. Nobody told him of the devout belief of thousands who merely had yearned for a gracious word from the lips of their mighty monarch.

On the 22nd of January, when the blood of the people flowed through the streets of St. Petersburg like a red river, the Czar noted in his diary : " What a hard day ! Unrest in St. Petersburg. Military was

forced to shoot. Many dead and wounded. Dear God, how it hurts me and how difficult it all is."

Lost in his dreams, the frail Czar, only now hearing the name of Gapon for the first time, did not realize that, on the 22nd of January, 1905, a bloody cross had arisen above the golden cupolas of old Russia like an invisible threat.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CZAR AND CÆSAR

LIKE the tattered flag of a defeated regiment, Russian absolutism fluttered in the storm of the revolution. A tense atmosphere surrounded the white palace of Peterhof. With fixed bayonets, scrupulously selected officers of the Czar's Guard patrolled the deserted lanes of the park. In the little bay nearby a torpedo boat flotilla, flying the imperial standard with the large cross of St. Andrew, was kept under full steam. The residence of the Russian Czar resembled the camp of a conqueror amidst a revolting country, newly subjugated.

Apprehensively, the carefully selected officers of the Guard gazed upon the frail, imperial figure when the Czar, pale of face, promenaded past the beautiful Elizabethan fountains. In the dusk of long summer evenings, Nicholas watched the luminous play of the splashing waters. Every drop mirrored the magic of autocracy: just as drops of water merge in the sea, so the people merged in Czardom.

Everything in the country—the people, the houses, the rivers, even the very soil—belonged to the Czar, in the same sense that his hands, his eyes and his children were his property. In the consciousness of a Russian there was no proprietor other than the monarch. If the peasant was allowed to breathe, if the burgher was permitted to dwell in a house, if the sun rose and the earth bore fruit, it was due to the unfathomable kindness of the Anointed One, and not an inalienable right. And if the Czar's wrath should fall upon the heads of his people, if he should throw firebrands into the huts of his peasantry, or seize their children and womenfolk, it would not be injustice; it merely would mean that the Czar wished to revoke a voluntarily granted privilege. The Czar was the spirit of the people incarnate, and his autocracy an active manifestation of the whole nation, concentrated into one person.

For two centuries Russia tried to interpret the genesis of this power. The magic might of the Czar fought against the mailed fist of the Cæsars. The Roman ideology of Cæsarism, forcibly transplanted to Russia, was opposed to the old Oriental symbolism of rule. The Emperor was not the head of a tribe or clan, nor yet a totem, but the supreme leader who seized power over the people to exert it for himself and his army. In the course of centuries the more the sword of the Emperor overshadowed the crown which the Czar received from God in all humility, the more incomprehensible their ruler became to the Russian people.

Watching the fountains of Peterhof, the Czar thought of the symbols

of his power and the pious simplicity that had marked the ancient conception of rule. Now, his fondest dreams and holiest ideals lay in the dust, dragged, as they had been, through the mire of St. Petersburg's streets. Fixed bayonets protected the heir of Peter the Great against the all too complicated problems of the nineteenth century. Amidst the straight and clear-cut walks of the park the Czar longed for the straight and clear-cut rule of his forebears. As simple and as straight as these lanes—that was how his rule should be! Doubtless, a loyal and honest man could find the way out which learned ministers, in their complicated cogitations, would never discover.

The loyal and honest man to whom the Czar was to entrust the rule of his realm was General Demetrius Trepov.

The father of the General had rendered extraordinary services in the annihilation of revolutionaries; indeed, he had been wounded by the renowned revolutionary, Vera Sasulitch. As Chief Master of Police of Moscow, the son earned the approval of the Governor-General, Grand-duke Sergius. Moreover, Trepov once had served with the Imperial Horse Guards. Officers of that privileged regiment—merely by belonging to that crack unit—automatically enjoyed the unbounded confidence of the monarch. With Court Minister Frederiks acting as his sponsor, General Demetrius Trepov made an extremely favourable impression on Their Imperial Majesties.

Trepov had a loud voice and eyes that gleamed with energy. He was of gigantic stature and appeared to the Czar the very prototype of a healthy and straightforward soldier. He served his imperial master with unswerving, canine fidelity. Contrary to most of the officials of the realm, Trepov was not only an obedient subject of His Majesty Emperor Nicholas II, but he also represented one of the extremely few who stood ready to serve Colonel Nicholas Alexandrovitch Romanov with utmost loyalty.

Two days after Red Sunday the Czar put the fate of his trembling empire into the hands of Trepov. Officially, the General was appointed Vice-Minister of the Interior and Governor-General of St. Petersburg; unofficially, he actually was made the unrestricted dictator of a Russia not only beset with domestic unrest, but at the same time deeply involved in a most unfortunate Far Eastern campaign.

Confronted by the fear-inspiring eyes of General Trepov, the Liberal Prince Mirski preferred to retire to a life of aristocratic solitude. Mirski's successor, as Minister of the Interior, was a phlegmatic and indifferent man by the name of Bulygin. In reply to comments on how one or the other measure had been handled by his ministry, it was his custom to remark: "I have only just seen it in the papers myself."

The political programme of the new dictator was to the point—and yet it was warped. Trepov intended to solve the labourers' problems in accordance with Subatov's tried prescription. "They are only mutineers," the Minister declared resolutely. "Beat them down. If they talk too loudly, attack them. The workers want a revolution?"

Why, all that is necessary is to play the part of a ' police revolutionary ' and you will hold them in the hollow of your hand." If there were to be street demonstrations, Trepov's order to the military was : " Don't save bullets ! "

Trepov also proposed a simple and sure method of curbing the Liberal students. He suggested to the monarch that each and every institution of higher learning throughout the Empire be closed for all time to come. The universities were to be transformed into barracks with such education, as seemed necessary, best left to private initiative.

At the same time, however, he proposed a number of measures to the Czar that were so radical that even the most consistent revolutionaries stood aghast. Trepov considered safeguarding the monarchy his chief task, and if it should prove, for example, that the monarchy could be served best by the destruction of capitalism, the brave General would not hesitate for a moment to execute a few bankers in the Palace Square.

On the 6th of June, 1905, Trepov opened the Czar's residence to the representatives of the intelligentsia. A deputation of Liberal politicians appeared in the palace and, through the Liberal Prince Trubetskoi, the Czar was informed that Russian peasantry was eager to be governed according to the principles of Western capitalism. The heralds of this alleged desire on the part of the peasantry were fourteen aristocrats, among them bearers of such old, noble names as Prince Shachovskoi, Prince Dolgorukov, Prince Lvov, and Count Heiden. There were no peasants in the deputation at all. The Czar replied with a few meaningless words, and as the fourteen deeply disappointed aristocrats bowed before the ruler, Trepov recognized that, once again, it was not the people themselves, but rather the arrogant nobility who dared to oppose the Czar.

As recently as in the days of Ivan the Terrible, noble boyar families had attempted to foist their will upon the Czar. However, the rebellious boyars had been drowned in a river of blood by the cruel Ivan. Peter the Great, too, had annihilated aristocrats daring to oppose him with sword and gunpowder. When Paul I began to exert his imperial power over the heads of the aristocrats, it was not loyal peasants who broke into his bedchamber, but five nobles : The Princes Dolgoruki, Wjamesky, Jashvil, and Subov, and the Counts Uvarov and Panin. When the son and heir of the murdered Paul refused to grant privileges to the nobles, the Princes Odojevski, Trubetskoi, and Volkonski, together with Count Muraviev, headed the aristocratic regiments marching against the Winter Palace. Even now, after many centuries, it was not the people bowing before the Czar in stubborn disrespect ; once again, it was the representatives of old noble families—princes and counts, the heirs of Rurik and Hedemin.

Trepov decided to resist the organized strength of a disloyal nobility with all the strength of a people loyal to their Czar. When Ivan IV had suppressed the boyar rebellion he had surrounded himself with bold men, forming them into the Opritshniki regiments. The coat

of arms of these regiments had been a dog's head and a broom. The broom had indicated that anti-Czarist shame was to be swept off the face of the earth, and it was to the dogs that the bodies of the Czar's enemies were to be thrown.

Times had changed, and so had the coat of arms of General Trepov's Oprishnikis. The image of Archangel Michael became the escutcheon of the Black Hundred, that band of loyal men chosen to eradicate all traces of Liberal rebellion. The Red Terror of the revolution was to be opposed by the White Terror of the Black Hundred.

The voice of the loyal people, however, was not only to be heard in the ranks of the Black Hundred. Liberal congresses and assemblies were to be silenced by the mighty voice of a *Duma*, loyal to the Czar. This Duma was to be assembled primarily from the lower strata of the populace who would accept the will of the monarch in mute submission.

The ukase of the Czar of the 6th of August, 1905, created this parliament without parliamentarism. Nicknamed "Bulygin's Duma," it was merely to submit suggestions to the monarch, most respectfully, and then, in turn, to accept, just as meekly, the Czar's decisions.

With the officiousness of an ambitious policeman, Trepov tried to reawaken shadows of a political past amidst a country rife with rebellion. In turn, against these forbidding shadows there arose, with elementary strength, the spirit of the future, ready to overthrow past and present in one tremendous, irresistible onslaught, thus burying the glorious House of Romanov beneath the debris of absolutism.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE ASSASSINATION OF GRANDDUKE SERGIUS

**A**LTHOUGH his cruelty equalled that of a degenerate child, Grandduke Sergius was the favourite uncle and brother-in-law of the Czar. Nicholas II entrusted to him complete power over the holiest city of the realm : Moscow, Cradle of the Romanovs. The pale, finely chiselled face of the Grandduke, framed by a silky beard, was dominated by a pair of eyes burning with the fire of madness. Whenever his carriage raced through the streets of Moscow, startled passers-by jumped out of its path in all haste.

To maintain peace and order in city and country, Sergius knew of only one means : Merciless, brutal, widespread terror. During the entire period that the Grandduke ruled over Moscow, there were never any disturbances in that city.

On the 4th of February, 1905—two weeks before the disastrous Battle of Mukden—the Grandduke's carriage raced through the streets. A plainly dressed man appeared at the crossing and rushed towards the carriage, gesticulating wildly. When close to the coach, he halted and, with all his strength, flung a small, dark object at the feet of the horses. A terrific detonation resounded and the eviscerated team rolled on the ground. The gala coach was smashed to atoms. Two little girls, festively garbed, were torn to pieces by splinters of the bomb. The children had eagerly awaited their first sight of a real, live grandduke. Now, the blood-drenched and dismembered corpse of His Imperial Highness, Grandduke Sergius, Governor-General of the City of Moscow, was lying beneath the debris of the coach.

The deafening repercussion of the terrific explosion was heard far away. Window panes rattled throughout the entire city. In the nearby Café Filipov, cups tumbled to the floor. On the terrace of the café sat an elegant man, with small gleaming eyes and a prominent shining bald pate. The gentleman was engrossed in his newspaper. Startled by the explosion, he arose. Complaining bitterly about "the terrible times we are living in," he folded his paper carefully and left the café.

Kaljajev, assassin of the Grandduke, was apprehended and subsequently executed. But, after all, he was only a tool in the hands of the real murderer—none other than that elegant gentleman who had complained so bitterly about "the terrible times." While he enjoyed the nickname of "General Bo," his real name was Boris Savinkov. Among initiates, he also was referred to as "Prince Hamlet who craves the part of Cesare Borgia."

Two hours after the Grandduke's assassination, news of his violent

end reached Peterhof Palace where the Czar resided at that time. It was deathly quiet at Peterhof; pale courtiers moved through the halls spectrally. "The favourite uncle of the Czar," they whispered. "How dreadful!"

There was nobody to convey the dire news to the Czar. "He is liable to kill the messenger," the courtiers exclaimed, their voices trembling.

"Who will tell him?" was the anxious query.

Names fluttered through the room. At last, from the hasty, apprehensive whispers, from the confused groping, from the desperate search emerged just one feasible suggestion: "The Emperor's mother." She alone could convey the terrible message to her son.

"Yes, the Emperor's mother," nodded the Minister of the Court gravely, "she must do it."

The Czar sat by the window of the small, east-wing *salon*. Dusk was falling. He watched the play of the wraithlike shadows of the bare trees before his window. His face was tranquil. The day's work was done; no more reports were expected. The big chair was soft and comfortable, inviting relaxation. But was it not the selfsame chair in which ill-fated Paul once had rested? A hundred years lay between the Czar and his unfortunate predecessor. Unfortunate? Who, after all, in the long row of Romanovs, had ever been fortunate?

The Czar recalled that it was in this very *salon* that the King of England had been his luncheon guest. "That profile of your husband," Edward VII had said to Alix, "greatly resembles that of Czar Paul." From the icy silence that had followed his words, the King concluded that he had made a *faux pas*. Edward VII had not been very well versed in the history of the Romanovs. He had not known that the ill-starred, ugly Paul had been given the epithet of "that revolting snub-nosed dwarf." Nor had he known that, in the assassination of the dwarf, the English ambassador, Sir Whitworth, had not been entirely blameless.

The Czar looked about. The dusk of twilight played on the mirrored door. The mirror reflected a pale face with large eyes, a blond, pointed beard and a slightly elongated skull. Nothing in that face could remind one of Paul. The mirrored image moved. It came closer and half disappeared from the mirror. Where the right moustache and cheek had been, now appeared a hand, softly turning the door-knob. Empress-Mother, Maria Feodorovna, was entering the room.

She approached her son. "My poor Niki," she said, stroking his hair. "Something terrible has happened."

The Czar gazed at her questioningly. His eyes assumed a tired and tortured expression.

The Empress bent toward him. "Uncle Sergius," she whispered, her voice hardly audible.

The Czar closed his eyes; he covered his face with his hands. Muffled sobbing was heard in the small, half-dark *salon*. Was it the mother? Was it the son?

Darkness fell ; all rooms in the palace were lighted except the small *salon* in the east wing. That room remained pitch dark.

In another wing of Peterhof Palace, Prince Frederick Leopold of Prussia was dressing. The Prince had come to Peterhof, a few days previously, to visit the Czar. Nicholas II had invited him to an intimate supper that evening. At the moment that the Prince's valet was laying out Frederick Leopold's gala uniform, an aide-de-camp appeared to report Grandduke Sergius's assassination.

"What a frightful catastrophe!" said the Prince, and blanched. In the same instant, however, he thought: "How awkward, just now, when I am visiting here. Naturally, I shall disturb the bereft family with my presence as little as possible."

"The supper, of course, will be cancelled," the Prince remarked to his aide-de-camp. "At any rate, go and find out."

The aide-de-camp departed and came back with the information: "The supper has not been cancelled."

The Prince dressed with a heavy heart ; with a heavy heart, too, he entered the dining-room. The Czar and Grandduke Alexander were already there and both were laughing. "Ah, there you are, Royal Highness," Nicholas greeted the Prince, shaking hands with him.

Conversation was most animated during the supper. Grandduke Alexander told jokes and Nicholas laughed appreciatively. Not one word was said about the assassination. The Prussian Prince could not believe his eyes ; he thought himself in an insane asylum with two of the inmates performing an execrable dance at an open grave.

Supper over, Czar and Grandduke repaired to a narrow divan. Before the eyes of the bewildered Prince, an incredible scene took place. Czar and Grandduke poked each other with their elbows, both laughing in childish glee ; the one thrown off the divan first would be the loser.

"Doesn't the Czar know anything about the assassination?" the Prince asked his aide-de-camp on the way back to his suite.

"Of course, Your Royal Highness ! The Dowager-Empress herself conveyed the sad news to His Imperial Majesty," the Adjutant replied.

The Prince shrugged in amazement. "I cannot understand . . . it is beyond comprehension," he murmured, shaking his head.

Even as Czar and Grandduke tickled and nudged each other in their childish game, a heavily veiled woman—her eyes swollen from weeping—entered a cell of the Moscow prison. She was Grandduchess Elizabeth, wife of the assassinated Sergius, and sister of the Czarina. She had come to see her husband's murderer.

After the barred door had been locked behind her and she faced the assassin, all alone, she lifted her veil. "You will be hanged to-morrow," she exclaimed. "Oh, why did you do it?"

The prisoner avoided her eyes. Perhaps he was thinking of the elegant gentleman with the shining, bald pate on the terrace of Café Filipov. Perhaps, too, he thought of the far-away committee of terrorists that would avenge his execution in time. At last, he answered



POPE GAPON, THE NOTORIOUS LABOUR LEADER  
" The pope believed he had been sent by Heaven to save Russia "



drily : " My principles imposed the assassination upon me as a duty." Then, a sudden change came over him. He looked at the Grand-duchess, threw himself at her feet and kissed the hem of her garment. From his inarticulate sobbing, emerged the words : " Dear God, what anguish ! "

The Grandduke's assassin was hanged the following day. The Grandduchess entered a nunnery and scarcely anything was heard of her thereafter. Although she had been very popular at the Russian Court she soon was forgotten, and only in 1918 came into prominence again. In the Siberian city of Alapajevsk she was seized by the Bolsheviks and suffered a cruel death. Had her husband's assassin foreseen her fate when he had cried brokenly : " Dear God, what anguish ! "

Neither on the day that his favourite uncle was assassinated, nor on the days to follow, was there any perceptible change in the Czar's behaviour. He was, as always, reserved, friendly, unobtrusive.

A few weeks after the assassination, the Czar received the meritorious General Kasbitch, Governor of a far eastern province. There, unrest among the workers had set in and the General had called out the military. But in order to forestall a bloody encounter between the populace and the troops the General had appeared on the balcony of his palace, and had delivered a stirring two-hour lecture on Christian virtue and the fulfilment of man's duty. Then and there a miracle took place ; the lecture proving efficacious. Deeply touched and filled with shame, the mob of workers dispersed.

" And in exactly that way, Your Majesty," the General wound up, " I succeeded in avoiding unnecessary bloodshed, death, and murder."

The Czar's face became distorted into a fearful grimace at these words. Clenching his fist, he rushed at the General and shouted : " You must shoot, General, you must shoot ! You must use bayonets and bullets against that rabble ! You must tear them to pieces ! "

The General retreated, appalled. In confusion and dismay he descended the staircase. That same evening, he handed in his resignation.

The Czar's enraged advice had been heard in the antechamber. Before long all Russia knew of it. One whispered it in the ear of the other and, presently, as if it were an incantation, the whole country repeated the words : " The bloody Czar ! The bloody Czar ! "

After the death of Grandduke Sergius, the palace was as quiet as a mortuary. A strange void surrounded the Czar. Suddenly it proved very difficult for the monarch to find suitable candidates for the posts of generals and governors-general. The highest dignitaries of the country experienced an irrepressible urge to visit spas in foreign countries, there to find relief from old ailments. At the same time they entrusted their fortunes to banks in Berlin and Stockholm.

Eventually the number of assassinated and wounded generals, governors, and other officials reached the staggering total of 489.

The Czar's hand grew tired from signing death warrants. On the margin of reports on the assassinations of his best servants he could only write the stereotyped sentence: "Irreplaceable loss. His dependents are to be taken care of."

In the middle of June, 1905, news of rebellion aboard the armoured-cruiser *Potemkin* startled the palace like a sudden clap of thunder, ushering in the end of the world. This breach of discipline impressed the supreme War Lord of Russia far more than had the loss of his Baltic fleet at Tsushima on the 27th of May, 1905. On the day of the *Potemkin* rebellion the Czar wrote in his diary the only angry sentence he ever included in those intimate notes: "It seems unbelievable. . . . What the devil is going on in the fleet? . . . If only the rest of the crew remains loyal! . . . The mutineers must be punished severely."

In view of the decimated army, the revolting fleet, and the threatening revolution, the Czar decided to accept President Theodore Roosevelt's offer of mediation. The unfortunate war, which had been draining Russia's strength for many months, was to find a peaceful solution on the soil of the United States.

The same ailments, however, which forced the dignitaries of the realm to visit foreign spas for relief, prevented them from subjecting themselves to the hardships of a trip to America. One and all were afraid of assuming such a thankless task. The more the lines of the dignitaries were thinned out the more clearly arose, on the horizon of imperial observation, the gigantic figure of Witte. Whilst fleet and army were annihilated in defeat, and whilst revolution shook the realm to its very depths, Witte's fame had grown immeasurably. That astute man had foreseen imminent disaster and had warned against the Far Eastern adventure, eventually retiring in bitter humiliation when his words fell upon deaf ears.

"If the Czar will ask it of me personally, I shall be ready to go to America," Witte stipulated to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Lambsdorff. Witte's condition was accepted. From Nicholas's own hand, Witte received orders to repair to Portsmouth, N.H., to act as the Czar's plenipotentiary.

During the days that Witte, aboard the North-German Lloyd liner *Wilhelm der Grosse*, sailed towards America, the Czar locked himself up in Pavlovsk. Through sleepless nights Nicholas pondered over Witte's mission. To that shrewd statesman he had entrusted the honour of the Russian Empire. "Not one square inch of Russian soil, not one copeck in tribute," had been the Czar's instructions.

Witte found himself in a very awkward position because, aligned against him, were the revolutionaries, the Czar, the Japanese army, and the public opinion of the United States. "I decided to act," Witte writes in his memoirs, "as if Russia were a mighty imperium and had suffered merely a slight, disagreeable inconvenience in some distant part of its realm."

At the same time Witte, employing all the tricks of a clever diplomat,

ardently wooed America's favour. Despite all warnings he insisted upon visiting New York's East Side, crowded with Russian Jewry. The hearts of simple peddlers and second-hand clothes dealers promptly melted when this distinguished messenger of the Russian Czar inquired about their business. On the railway trip from New York to Portsmouth, upon leaving his coach, he displayed his democratic spirit to the Press representatives by shaking hands with the train personnel. Witte joked genially with journalists, graciously accepted invitations for innumerable banquets, fulsomely praised all the institutions of the New World, and sadly confided to his diary that American hospitality had ruined his Russian stomach for at least three months.

Witte attained his goal. When the Press of the world laid eyes upon the small, ugly Japanese delegate, Baron Kurino, standing beside the genially laughing giant Witte, Russia won the first battle of the fateful war—a battle not fought for the possession of a province, for a fortress, or for a city, but for the public opinion of the United States. And under pressure of this public opinion the Japanese renounced their claims for provinces, cities and tributes. "You are not the victors," Witte assured the Nipponese delegate. "Only if your army had stood before the very gates of Moscow could one speak of a Japanese victory."

When the Japanese, after many renunciations, insisted upon retaining half of Saghalin, Witte fought with the courage of a lion for the retention of this icy island. Finally, it became necessary for President Roosevelt to communicate with the Czar over the head of the stubbornly inflexible Witte. When the ambassador of the United States called upon the Czar he found the Emperor playing tennis. Nicholas put aside the racket for a moment, shook hands with the ambassador, renounced half of Saghalin Island and returned to his game. The war was ended.

On the night of the 17th of August, 1905, the Czar received a cablegram from Witte. Peace had been concluded. "After this information I felt as if I were under a spell," Nicholas wrote in his diary. "Peace has been concluded. It is probably best so because it is inevitable."

Secretly, however, he bore a grudge against the statesman who had signed his name to Russia's greatest shame. Exile and punishment were to descend upon the head of the proud minister. However, when Witte, on his return to Russia, was invited to go hunting by the German Kaiser and was fêted and honoured as a great peacemaker while at Rominten in East Prussia, the Czar felt constrained to be gracious towards him.

On the 16th of September Witte returned to St. Petersburg and, on the 18th, he boarded the imperial yacht *Standard* on which Nicholas II was cruising in the Gulf of Finland.

The Emperor was alone when he received Witte in his state-room. "You have brilliantly fulfilled your delicate mission in accordance with the instructions I gave you," the monarch pronounced. "You have rendered extraordinary services to me and to Russia. As a sign of my recognition I herewith invest you with the title of Count."

Touched beyond words, Witte kissed the Czar's hand.

Although the monarch's gratitude was in recognition of Witte's consummate statesmanship, by no means did it denote affection on the part of Nicholas the man. Shortly after Witte had been created a count, the Czar had a revealing conversation with old Princess Golitzyn.

"Don't you think it would be interesting, Your Majesty," the Princess remarked, "to open a man's brain and see what is hidden inside?"

"Whose brain is it that interests you so much?" the Czar asked.

"The brain of Count Witte."

"It is easy to guess what you would find there. . . . You would discover that he hates me just as much as I hate him."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THE PREY

**A** LONG the entire course of the Volga the estates of the nobles were aflame. Both banks of the river reflected the reddish glow of the conflagrations. Armed with strong axes, the *mushiks* chopped holes in the ice, and through these holes, landowners, policemen and popes vanished forever. In the stables of aristocratic estates, pedigreed livestock were slaughtered mercilessly and senselessly. These thoroughbreds aroused the murderous hatred of the peasantry because they called to mind the noble blood of their owners.

The fires along the Volga in turn kindled others in the Caucasus. Down south along the shores of the Caspian Sea, the oil derricks around Baku flared up like so many torches. A wave of pogroms swept the mud-caked roads of Ukrainian villages. In Kronstadt, Sevastapol and Kertch, sailors and soldiers mutinied. On the shores of the Baltic Sea bands of Latvian revolutionaries ruthlessly demolished the castles of German barons. Governors suddenly found themselves prisoners in their own palaces, the guard in front of their gates frequently representing the only dependable military unit in the whole province.

Like a scourge of God, an army of millions, returning from the ill-fated war in Manchuria, was pouring back across Russia. In industrial centres throughout the realm, workmen's councils were organized, called "soviets." They demanded the abdication of the monarch and insisted upon a proclamation of the republic.

The Czar dispatched the choicest regiments of the Guard to restore order. The famous Preobrashensky marched through the woods of the Baltic provinces; the Cavaliers' Guard patrolled the streets of St. Petersburg; the Semionovzy protected Peterhof; and innumerable troops of fierce cossacks overflowed the steppes of the Ukraine.

Revolutionary Russia opposed the Cavaliers' Guard and the Semionovzy with the threat of a general strike. On the 8th of October, 1905, one million people of all strata of the population ceased work. Railroads stopped; post office and telegraph stations remained closed; entire cities cloaked themselves in complete darkness.

The wide extent of the strike could be easily deducted from official bulletins of the Russian Telegraph Agency. Not one public institution had remained untouched. All had joined the tremendous demonstration: high school pupils and university students, railroad employees, engineers, agricultural labourers, factory workers, telegraphers, post office clerks, compositors, printers, physicians, complete military

units, state officials, bank clerks, lawyers and judges, house employees, waiters, apothecaries, porters, and policemen.

The capital appeared like a dead, deserted city. The streets were empty; the exchanges closed. There were merely a few *salons* where excited politicians met to discuss whether Grandduke Demetrius, Prince Dolgoruki, or perhaps Prince Shtsherbatov would be the future Russian Czar.

The atmosphere in Castle Peterhof was indeed depressing. Courtiers crept along the dark halls of the palace like so many ghosts. Ministers could reach Peterhof only after a carriage ride of many hours. In the rooms of the Court chancellery grey and haggard figures congregated. Completely exhausted, the courtiers sank into deep leather chairs. Count Benckendorff, Chief Marshal of the Court, his face ashen, regarded the crowd of officials surrounding him and declared: "It is too bad that the Emperor has five children. It will make flight to a foreign country very difficult for him."

During those tragic and dark days when absolutism died, the Czar's typical Romanov traits manifested themselves strikingly. With an unsurpassable calm, Nicholas played billiards, went on little trips in a small motor-boat, admired sunsets and received courtiers who discovered—quite suddenly—that there were very important personal matters to be taken care of in foreign countries. Nicholas made the ironical note in his diary: "Lovely times, these!"

On Sunday, the 22nd of October, 1905, at six in the evening, Count Witte entered the Czar's study by imperial invitation. As on a similar occasion the previous year, the Emperor was not alone. Grandduke Sergius, whose mad gaze had rested on Witte the last time, was dead now. In his stead the Count found the Czarina Alexandra Feodorovna sitting stiffly erect and motionless, her nerves visibly taut. "She never uttered a word, but just sat like an automaton, and blushed like a lobster, as usual," Witte wrote subsequently.

In that dim study, speech sounded dull and weary. Opposite the frail and wan Czar and his petrified consort sat Witte in a proud posture, as one who is certain of victory. Indeed, he was the very incarnation of that much-despised, new and hostile world which so suddenly confronted the Czar, amidst the quiet plains of Russia.

Witte had no intention of sparing the imperial feelings. Assured of victory, he informed the Czar that the threatening dissolution of the Empire could be staved off only through a military dictatorship or a constitutional reform. He suggested that Grandduke Nicholas Nicholaievitch might be best qualified to assume the duties of a dictator, and as for the post of a reformer, he considered himself the most suitable candidate.

The Count went into great detail in regard to necessary reforms. Among the changes he proposed were freedom of the Press, religious liberty, general amnesty, and the introduction of a Duma whose elected representatives alone would be granted the prerogative of exerting legislative functions. "Of course, until recently," Witte interposed

significantly, "it might have been possible to save autocracy. Now, however, after the disgraceful war"—here he shot an accusing glance at the Emperor—"it is out of the question."

The Count knew exactly along what route the funeral *cortège* of absolutism must proceed. The old Ministers' Committee which, after all, was only a loosely knit organization, must be dissolved. It would be replaced by a Ministers' Council and, analogous to Western custom, a prime minister would supervise the activities of the various departments, after issuing general directions. The new Prime Minister was to be Count Witte himself.

The Czar received the detailed programme for a complete reformation of the Russian Empire from the hands of the Count. At the same time Witte stipulated that he would be ready to come to the assistance of the country, once more, only if the Czar would accept his programme without any change whatever.

Nicholas II took three days for the perusal of Witte's funeral oration at the grave of absolutism. On the fourth day—Wednesday, the 25th of October, 1905—Witte received the imperial message: "I herewith appoint you Chairman of the Ministers' Council for the purpose of unifying the activities of all ministers."

The infuriated Count rushed to Peterhof. In a ringing, sharp voice, he reiterated to the Czar that he would accept the appointment only if the Czar agreed to his entire programme and officially renounced absolutism.

On the 28th of October Witte's presence was commanded by the Czar once more. The Count remained at the palace until two in the afternoon, but the Czar still refused to sign the manifesto. "I must pray and think it over," he told Witte. "Go back to the city. By ten o'clock to-night I shall inform you whether I have reached a decision."

The huge grandfather clock in Count Witte's house on Kamenoïstrotsky Prospect struck ten. No word from the Czar had come yet. Witte arose and crossed himself: "Thank heaven," he said solemnly as one who had escaped imminent danger, "this time I have been spared the cup of sorrow."

However, the two reactionary old men, Goremykin and Baron Budberg, who had been invited to call upon the Czar unobtrusively at six o'clock that evening, did not dare plunge themselves into the vortex of revolution. With eager courtesy they changed the wording of Witte's outline; but they, too, refused to assume responsibility for the fate of the throne.

On the morrow, when the threat of famine stalked through the capital city, Count Witte's front-door bell was rung after midnight by Baron Frederiks, accompanied by the chief of his chancellery, Masolov. Gravely the two handed Witte his manifesto as it had been partly rewritten by Goremykin's reactionary hand. In reply, the Count went into a paroxysm of rage, his voice trembling in an excited falsetto. The shocked Frederiks had to listen to such abusive language about the Czar as his courtier's ears never had heard before.

During the night of the 29th of October, a fine, interminable rain fell. The clouds hung low over the palace. Sleep eluded the Czar. In his thoughts the roaring of the sea beneath his window was transformed to the rustling of the tree-tops in Belov Wood. There, each year, the Czar used to hunt aurochs. Rain had fallen frequently upon the wet, steaming ground when, trembling with anticipation, the Emperor had stalked the game. Was he himself the game now and absolutism the prey? It seemed as if all the people in all the Russias had become hunters with Count Witte as the Master of the Hunt and Absolutism the goal of their pursuit.

The Emperor's heart was heavy with apprehension. Were the people actually to be deprived of their Czar? Had not the House of Romanov ruled this wet, desolate country through centuries? Absolutism, after all, was not merely an empty gesture; it was a world conception. Pressing his face against the cold window pane, the Czar wondered how this old world conception could be retained in a new form. Of course, the new Duma, too, would have to take an oath on the old-established absolutism. And should the deputies ever break their oath the Czar assuredly would know how to fulfil the pledge he had made on the day of his coronation.

The abstract analysis of the problems besetting the Czar wearied him; even as in the world outside his window, autumn had come into his own life. During the last night of omnipotence, with Nicholas indulging in syllogisms, the patter of the rain on the window panes echoed and re-echoed: The end, the end, the end.

The Czar turned away from the window. "There are no loyal servants left," he muttered fatigued. "I must await Nicolasha's advice," he pondered, recalling his huge uncle who, alone of all the relatives, had rushed from his estate to St. Petersburg to be of assistance to his imperial nephew. The Grandduke's appearance at Court had assuaged the excited courtiers, who had immediately concluded that he had come to assume the military dictatorship. Nicholas had been conferring with the Grandduke for a few days. On the morning of the 30th of October, Nicholai Nicholaievitch was to advise him of his definite opinion.

The Grandduke was of gigantic stature. His voice thundered, and his enormous eyes flashed wildly. When he strode across the soft rugs of the palace with his enormous feet, those who watched him had the feeling that the elegant halls suddenly were filled with the free, driving winds of the Asiatic steppes. At parades it was the Grandduke's greatest pleasure to view whole regiments of cavalry galloping past him. Watching them spellbound he would beat his chest exultantly and twist his cap, finally ripping it to pieces; from his throat issued savage, inarticulate sounds. At such moments he resembled a Mongolian Khan more than an imperial prince. Because of his striking enthusiasm for cavalry he was generally considered a great strategist.

The Grandduke always entered the Czar's palace as if he were leading a cavalry charge. He had a way of throwing open the doors

and walking so fast that his aide-de-camp never could keep up with him. Planting himself before the Czar, like a colossus, he would roar at him : " Good morning, Niki ! " Beside his gigantic uncle the Czar seemed even frailer than usual. His face flushing he would rise shyly and self-consciously and whisper : " Good morning, Uncle."

The Czar feared Nicholai Nicholaievitch. He was intimidated by his uncle's powerful frame and his bellowing voice, and by the entire bewildering world in which he dwelt. Deep down in his heart, Nicholas harboured the belief that this giant of a man could throw any czar off the throne with one violent kick and place the crown of the Romanovs on his own head. At such moments the Czar hated the Grandduke thoroughly.

The robust figure and wild eyes of the Grandduke, however, did not cloak real strength of character or insatiable greed for power. True, the Grandduke did not love his frail, weak nephew. But then, this nephew was the Anointed One, and the Grandduke had his own opinion regarding the holy person of a czar.

" Do you think our ruler is human ? " he once asked Count Witte in a confidential talk.

Witte replied soberly : " God gave us His Majesty as a ruler but, naturally, he is human with all the attributes of mortal man."

The Grandduke stared into the distance for a while and then replied, his voice ringing with conviction : " You are all wrong, my dear Witte, the Czar is not human, neither is he a god. Perhaps he is something in between—a demi-god ? "

At home, whether in his palace or on his estate, the Grandduke affected semi-darkness, soft sighs, and mystical conversations. He carried on occult conversations with his wife, the Montenegrin princess, whose soul was completely steeped in supernatural magic. Because the Grandduke ranked higher than anyone, with the exception of the Czar, and because he could not do very much with this one higher being, only God and the ghosts were left for his personal private intercourse. God was far away, inaccessible and impenetrable as befits a strict superior. The ghosts, on the other hand, could be subdued. The Grandduchess assured him of that as did certain courtiers and generals.

On long, quiet wintry nights, the Grandduke and his courtiers assembled around a table. Windows and doors were locked. The long nervous fingers of the Grandduke slid across the table and the séance began. From magic darkness emerged the spirit of Peter the Great, or perhaps the spirit of some stoker at the Court of Alexius Michailovitch. Cups rattled, tables rapped, the Grandduke sat with his eyes half-closed, his lips twitching. He felt himself being gradually transported from the terrestrial realm into the kingdom of the supernatural.

When the revolution of 1905 came, the Grandduke did not ask the advice of generals, ministers, and officials ; he asked the spirits, and they were entirely in favour of a constitution. Imbued with this

knowledge, Nicholai Nicholaievitch rushed through the Czar's palace like a whirlwind. In the great reception hall he encountered the old Count Frederiks, a lifelong friend of his. With his left hand the Grandduke caught the Minister by the scruff of his neck ; in his right, gleamed a revolver.

"Count," he roared, "I am on my way to the Czar. If he doesn't grant a constitution immediately I shall send a bullet through my head."

And before Count Frederiks could grasp the situation the Grandduke had flung open the door to the Czar's study. Presently two voices were heard, one thundering, the other trembling.

"How do you do, Niki."

"How are you, Uncle ? "

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE END OF ABSOLUTISM

THE conversation between Czar and Grandduke lasted only a few minutes. Nicholai Nicholaievitch came rushing out of the Czar's study, planted himself before Count Frederiks like a behemoth and roared: "His Majesty approves of the manifesto. Get Witte immediately and have clean copies of the document made in the chancellery."

Accompanied by Nicholai Nicholaievitch and Count Frederiks, Witte entered the imperial study at five o'clock that afternoon. Nicholas II sat at his desk. With a deep genuflection Frederiks handed him the manifesto. The Czar's grey eyes, shadowed by long, silky lashes, were glued to the document. Representing the imperial family, the Court, and the Government, the three waited patiently. No escape for the frail monarch was possible. From a wall of the room, the icon of St. Seraphim looked down in silent displeasure.

The Emperor arose. He crossed himself, with his right hand, Byzantine fashion. Then he sat down and signed the manifesto. With business-like precision, Witte tucked the paper into his briefcase.

The Grandduke and Count Witte were conveyed back to St. Petersburg in the imperial yacht. The eyes of the Grandduke gleamed with wild joy, his voice was as strident as a fanfare. Staring into the void with all the solemnity of a visionary, he announced to the new dictator: "To-day is the 30th of October, 1905, the anniversary of the Borki catastrophe. For the second time, this day has saved the imperial family."

Meanwhile, back in his study in Peterhof, the Emperor paced up and down with bowed head. His desk, the pictures on the wall—everything seemed suddenly strange to him. Dusk fell. In the gloaming even familiar objects assumed hostile and threatening forms. For many years to come the Czar was to experience a painful, depressing sensation upon entering this room. Later, he once made the remark: "This room recalls anxious days. It was right here that I felt this man Witte was bending every effort to lead me in the wrong direction. Alas, I lacked the strength to oppose him."

On the evening of that memorable day the Czar wrote in his diary: "At five o'clock I signed the manifesto. It has been a trying day and my head feels heavy, my thoughts are awlirl. May God help us to tranquillize Russia."

While the Czar thus recorded the decline of absolutism in his diary, an imperial manifesto appeared on all the walls and fences of

St. Petersburg, announcing the beginning of a new epoch. The manifesto read :

"The confusion and unrest in Our capital city and in many other parts of Our country fill Our heart with great and heavy sorrow. The weal of the Russian Emperor is indivisibly connected with the weal of His people. The troubles of His people become His worries. . . . The solemn oath of imperial service commands Us to employ every means at Our disposal to bring about an early termination of this unrest so dangerous to the realm. In fulfilment of Our irrevocable will We impose the duty upon the Government, that henceforth it shall be an unchangeable rule that no law may be put into effect without the approval of the Duma ; and, furthermore, that the representatives of the people are entitled to assure themselves of the legality of all activities on the part of authorities appointed by Us. We admonish all true sons of Russia to do their duty to their country ; to aid in the speedy termination of this unprecedented confusion ; and to re-establish tranquillity and peace in the homeland."

The typesetters and printers of St. Petersburg ended their strike so that the Czar's manifesto might be published. Telegraph offices were reopened to spread the word of the Czar throughout Russia. Engineers boarded their locomotives in order that the grace of the Czar could be proclaimed in distant cities. Enormous crowds, bearing red flags, gathered in Nevsky Prospect. Even the weather changed. Under the influence of imperial grace—and, incidentally, under the rays of the sun—both the hearts of the people and the snow in the streets melted. Disregarding the season, Liberal newspapers announced : " Spring in the heavens, spring in all hearts."

Amidst the wild jubilation of those days there were few who dwelt wistfully on the dead autocracy. Only in the narrow circle of aristocrats and clergy was the Emperor accused of breaking his holy coronation oath by permitting autocracy to be wrested from his weak grasp. Count Sheremtiev, a lifelong friend of the Emperor, and Russia's richest landowner, ordered that all pictures of the Czar in his castle be turned to the wall. An ecclesiastical newspaper in Moscow appeared with a border of mourning which framed the single sentence on its front page : " God save the Czar ! "

Grandduke Alexander describes the impression of those days in retrospect with more than a touch of bitterness. " Without gratifying the desires of the peasantry, Nicholas II renounced autocracy, regardless of the oath he had taken in Uspensky Cathedral on the occasion of his coronation, and in which he had promised to keep holy the commandments of his forebears. At last the intelligentsia was granted their much-desired parliament. The Russian Czar became a parody of the English King. The son of Alexander III agreed to share his power with a band of conspirators, political assassins, and inciters. This, then, was the end—the end of the dynasty and the end of the imperium."

The heritage of Russian absolutism was assumed by the new chairman of the Ministers' Council, Count Sergius Julievich Witte. Digni-

taries of old disappeared under Witte's regime into an abyss of oblivion. Pobedonostsev, Trepov, Bulygin, and many other ministers and governors were dismissed by the Czar with a friendly handshake. The ruler's power was scarcely sufficient to maintain his special favourite, Trepov, in the post of Palace Commandant. Replacing those who had been dismissed, the halls of the ministries were now crowded with mute creatures of the new "Grand Vizier," the "Count of Saghalin," as Witte was scornfully dubbed in Conservative circles.

Along with the dignity of a prime minister, Count Witte also assumed the dictatorial leanings of a born autocrat. While the *mushiks* vainly looked for relief in the wording of the imperial manifesto, and while the fires of peasant revolt spectrally illuminated Russia, Witte stamped out revolution with a heavy hand.

Only the Czar stood as a bulwark now between the intelligentsia of the cities and the disappointed *mushiks*.

The Liberal world that had undermined czardom now blanched as it beheld the infuriated Asiatic grimace, emerging from behind a screen of imperial bayonets which hitherto had obscured it. "The Russian intelligentsia should be grateful to the Czar for protecting them with his prisons and bayonets against the wrath of the peasantry. Woe to all of us if we ever should live to see the end of czardom," was written prophetically in *Vechi*, a periodical of that time.

The spirit of revolt still prevailed. On the 16th of December Witte had the St. Petersburg Soviet arrested. Presently the great Moscow revolt of Lenin set in. For three days Lenin knocked at the doors of the Kremlin, and for three days the age-old gilded cupolas—landmarks of Romanov power—looked down upon the revolution of the red Soviets. Eventually, the guns of General Dubassov squelched Lenin's revolt.

Two brutally energetic generals, Sakomelsky and von Rennenkampf, re-established regular railway traffic. A dozen resolute governor-generals tranquillized the Baltic region, the Caucasus, Siberia, and South Russia. The God-imposed order advanced victoriously. Liberal millionaires and princes fled to foreign lands; some committed suicide, others died of heart failure.

Punctual arrival of trains, policemen at street corners, and satisfied smiles on the part of Witte, regained for Russia the confidence of foreign countries. Moreover, France's loan of two and a half billion gold francs assured the Count of the ultimate victory of his dictatorship.

While Witte brought home the army from Siberia to Russia, and while he had peasants whipped in their villages, reinstating Liberal landowners to their sanctified rights of property, mute battalions of voters marched to the polls. To the chagrin of the Government the peasantry gave their newly acquired votes to those parties who had written into their programmes, in large letters, the word "Land," conspicuously absent in the imperial manifesto.

The radical results of the Duma election sealed Count Witte's fate.

Nicholas II, who, under Witte's pressure had been forced to acquiesce for the first time in his life, now dismissed the dictatorial Count.

Later, Witte sought to prove, in his memoirs, that he desired nothing more than to be relieved of the burden of his office. In reality, however, his dismissal struck him like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky. "I didn't leave; he threw me out," Witte declared, shortly after his retirement to Kokovzov. Even more bitter was his comment to Grandduke Alexander. "The Emperor," Witte said, "is an Oriental. A typical Byzantine. We conversed for two hours. He shook my hand and embraced me. He wished me lots of luck and success. Overcome with joy, I returned home . . . and on the same day I received the *ukase*, dismissing me."

To assuage the ruffled feelings of the dismissed dictator, the Czar sent him the jewelled Order of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, the selfsame ornament which he had worn on the day of his coronation in Uspensky Cathedral. With Witte removed, the Emperor felt the relief of one who has escaped a nightmare.

"What did the Czar say after he dismissed me?" Witte once asked an old courtier. The courtier snickered and replied: "All the Emperor said was . . ." and the courtier indulged in a vehement sigh of relief.

The revolution was over. The imperial double eagle arose majestically over the tranquillized country. The last echoes of the dying revolution faded like the lapping of a becalmed sea. The courtiers, miraculously cured of their assorted ailments, returned from their sojourns to foreign climes and once more lent colour to the halls of the imperial palaces. Emerging from their estates, the granddukes assured the Czar of their brotherly love and humble fealty. The Czar's signature, under the manifesto of the 30th of October, 1905, was the sole reminder that old Holy Russia's existence had come to an end, and that the Most Orthodox Czar had declared his readiness to share his power with rebellious lawyers, Liberal professors, and idealistic writers.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### "A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY UNDER AN AUTOCRATIC CZAR"

FROM the magic twilight of the "white nights" of St. Petersburg, from the heavy Neva fog, emerged strange and fantastic images and spectres. The exhalation of the Finnish swamps brought forth ghouls, cerberuses, basilisks, pre-diluvian monsters, and demons, their poisonous breath evidently seeking to destroy the old, strong capital of Peter the Great. The menacing wraiths of 120,000 *mushiks*, upon whose corpses the city was built, threatened to devour the noble Neva metropolis in a single onslaught.

The reception of the first Duma, held in the great Throne Room of the Winter Palace, on the 27th of April, 1906, appeared to the Czar to be precisely such a demoniacal assault.

The Throne Room of Saint George, with its pure white Corinthian columns, its enormous candelabras and marble balustrades was the centre of the palace. On one wall of the hall was a canopy. Eight steps led up to the throne of the Czar. Velvet-covered footstools, to the right and left of the throne, displayed the insignia of the imperial power: the crown, the sceptre and the imperial orb. Over the throne itself was draped the imperial coat of ermine, the thousand-year reign of the czars enveloped in its folds.

On the morning of the 27th of April, 1906, the Czarina herself, trembling a little, had spread the imperial cloak over the throne. With her own hands she had arranged the folds of the state robe. In the soft ermine she seemed to sense the dying spasms of autocracy. To-day, the 27th of April, 1906, the imperial family would take official farewell of absolutism.

At noon elegant courtiers crowded the Throne Room. Grey-haired counsellors of state, venerable senators, and members of the imperial entourage assumed their places to the right of the throne. Facing them, lined up on the other side of the throne, stood the deputies of the new Duma. Old and new Russia glared at each other with undisguised contempt. A wide aisle had been left open between the two groups so that the imperial couple might ascend the throne. In the centre of this aisle six tall tapers gleamed upon a small altar.

The entire atmosphere of the Throne Room was tense. The very apparel of the Duma deputies struck the gentlemen to the right of the throne as an unmistakable gesture of provocation. The aristocrats, standing in stiff dignity, had donned their most brilliant uniforms and bedecked their chests with medals. In contrast the Duma deputies—especially those in the first row—were unusually aggressive-looking types, attired in workmen's blouses, peasant shirts, and high, heavy

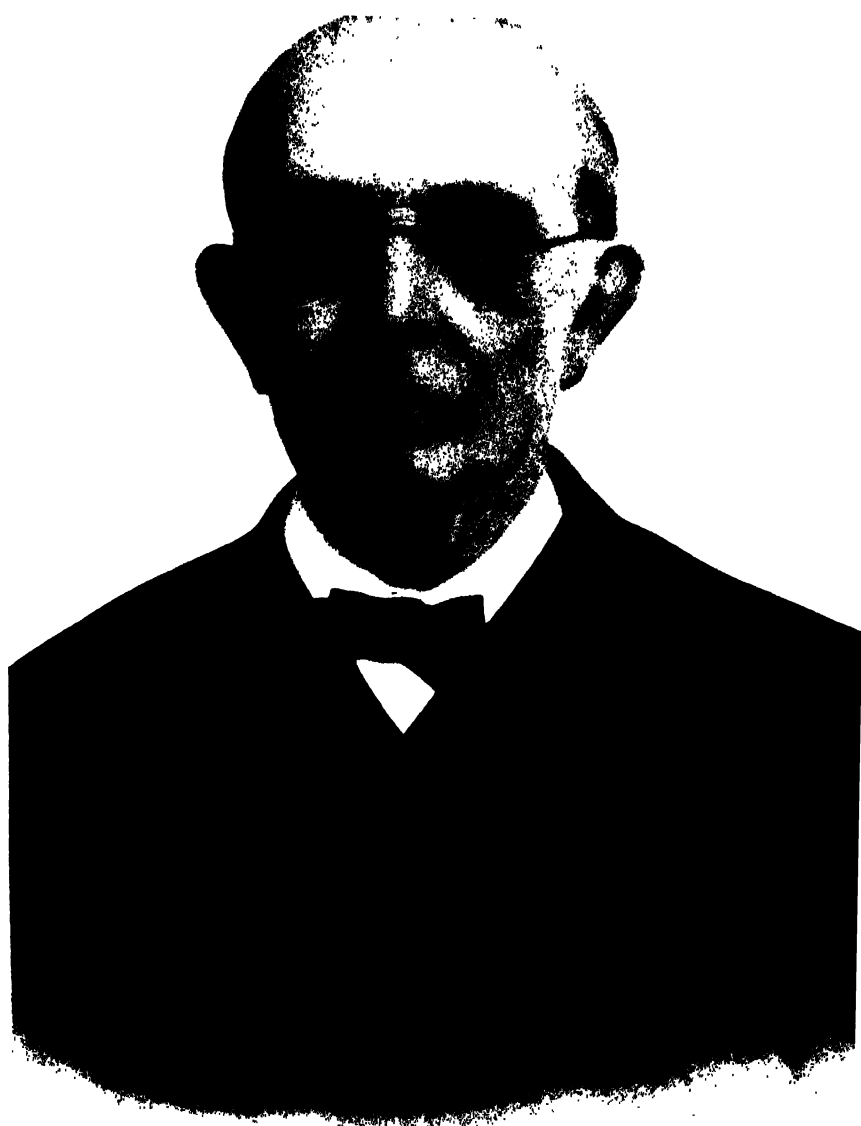
boots. It seemed as if the rebellious deputies of the Duma, by their marked informality of dress, had made it a point to proclaim democratic freedom and utter contempt for the arrogance of the courtiers.

At one o'clock the wide doors of the Malachite Hall opened, revealing the slight figure of the Czar. He was resplendent in the gala uniform of a colonel of his Preobrashensky regiment, an impressive array of orders across his chest. To his right was the Dowager-Empress, her serious face immobile as usual; to his left was Alexandra Feodorovna, her beautiful face as pale as the marble columns of the hall. The Czarina's thin lips were compressed, and her gaze was focussed upon the symbols of absolutism, displayed beneath the canopy. The deep voice of the Metropolitan filled the room. The Czar crossed himself fervently, his eyes expressing devout piety. The church choir implored God's blessing for the new imperial departure. The Czar strongly felt that, with the intonation of the old Slavonic chants, his realm was embarking upon a new epoch.

The choir silent, the monarch slowly ascended the throne. Court Minister Frederiks handed him the text of his speech. From the brocade-covered rostrum, Nicholas II studied the throng of deputies. Their strange faces filled him with suspicion. There they were, the rebels of yesterday! His imperial word had called them to the Neva city. Would they properly appreciate this proof of imperial favour?

Nicholas unfolded the sheets and read his speech from the throne. Expressed in archaic language, his address seemed a continuation of the ecclesiastical chants of the Metropolitan:

"Celestial Providence that imposed upon Us the responsibility for the weal of Our country has moved Us to summon the deputies of Our people for co-operation in legislative labours. Fervently believing in a glorious future for Russia, We welcome them as the representatives whom Our much-beloved subjects elected in accordance with Our command. Although difficult tasks await you, We are certain that love for your homeland and a burning desire to serve Russia will inspire and strengthen you. We, for Our part, shall steadfastly preserve the principles involving those privileges which were granted to you. We sincerely trust that you will consecrate all your strength to the service of the country so that you may ascertain the needs of the peasantry, so near and dear to Our heart, and may plan ways of increasing education and national wealth. While bent upon your labours, you will constantly bear in mind that the dignity and happiness of the Empire must rest firmly upon an order in accordance with the principles of law. May Our sincere wishes find fulfilment, so that We may leave a happy, strong, well-ordered, and enlightened Empire to Our son. God's blessing be upon the labours now before Us, the State's Council, and the Duma. May this day forever be a day of renewal of Russia's best forces. With the very best that is in you, embark, then, upon the labours for which We have called you together, and prove yourselves worthy of the confidence bestowed by Czar and people. May God be with Us and with you!"



POBEDONOSTSEV, SUPREME PROCURATOR OF THE HOLY SYNOD



The speech over, the grey-haired state counsellors, the officers, and courtiers shouted: "Hurrah!" But in the ranks of the Duma deputies, to the left of the throne, an ominous silence prevailed. The feudalistic tenor of the Czar's speech had outraged the democratic spirit of the representatives.

The ruler strode from the hall with measured steps. The door swung open. Followed by the Metropolitan, by generals and pages, the Czar left behind him the gloomy glances of the Duma deputies.

Silently, the representatives of the people left. Outside the sun was shining. An excited multitude surrounded them; a guard of honour presented arms. The bright sun, the wild acclaim of the people, their new dignity—all served to blind the Duma deputies. Presently, feeling very important indeed, they boarded a number of small Neva steamers conveying them to Taurida Palace, a meeting place of the Duma.

The new Prime Minister, Ivan Loginovitch Goremykin, now embarked upon the fulfilment of the imperial programme. Goremykin was an old man; indeed, the oldest minister of the realm. "His Majesty condescends to take me out of the camphor chest like an old, moth-eaten fur coat," he had said, when informed of his appointment.

Goremykin's age notwithstanding, the principles according to which he was to rule the realm were far older. Dating back to the year 1765, their originator was the famous Russian Field-Marshal, Count Burkhard Christian von Münnich. Once, when asked according to what principles government is carried on in Russia, this Court villain had replied: "In comparison to all other countries, the Russian Empire enjoys the great advantage of being governed by God Himself. Otherwise, how could its existence be explained?"

Goremykin completely agreed with Count Münnich's opinion. An empire ruled by God Himself really needed no prime minister; certainly it needed a Duma even less. "It is all nonsense; it will lead to nothing," was Goremykin's stereotyped reply to all governmental questions submitted to him. The very idea that a minister could recommend a measure to the Czar was regarded by Goremykin as ultra-revolutionary. In his opinion the business of government took care of itself for the simple reason that God's own blessings rested on it. According to Goremykin's mind, those who did not share his views were imbued with rebellious thoughts. He suspected not only Duma deputies and generals of treacherous leanings, but even the Czar himself. After the manifesto of the 30th of October, 1905, the only measure which seemed important to Goremykin was a speedy dissolution of the Duma and a return to the patriarchal form of government. In this regard, the Prime Minister was far more reactive than the Czar himself who never even thought of breaking his promise.

Nicholas II realized that Goremykin's shoulders—steepled with age as they were—certainly were not strong enough to cope with the burdens of government. However, he knew that this man, gentle to the extent that everything in the world appeared

could be depended upon absolutely. "The most important consideration for me," Nicholas said, "is my conviction that Goremykin will not do anything behind my back. I know I can have full confidence in him, and I know he will not take me unawares."

Co-operation between old Goremykin and the young Duma necessarily assumed strange forms. Each time the lisping and slobbering Goremykin appeared on the rostrum and began: "Gentlemen of the Duma," the unanimous demand resounded from the ranks of the deputies: "Resign, resign, resign!"

At such moments, the old man stroked his ultra-dignified beard and looked disdainfully at the people's representatives. Deep in the recesses of his heart, he longed for that hour when he might hold an imperial ukase in his hand, ordering the dissolution of this band of robbers. "'State's Duma,'" Goremykin reflected bitterly, and before his eyes arose, in sweet reverie, pictures of the old "Czar's Duma" which once, together with the Muscovite czars, had created the vast empire of Nicholas II.

"The 'Czar's Duma'!" In the old yellow chronicles of the Muscovite realm, this word was the very epitome of dignity, and loyalty to the Czar. Far back, in the days of Ivan the Terrible, Vassily III, and the quiet Alexius, the venerable, long-bearded boyars of the Czar assembled daily in the semi-darkness of the Gronovites' Hall in Moscow. Wearing the monomachist hat, the Czar, from his golden throne, listened to recorders reading reports and ukases, each opening with the sentence: "The Czar commands and the boyars resolve . . ."

In the old Duma little was said and that little was whispered ever so softly. The boyars stroked their beards, regarded the Czar with utmost respect, and if ever they argued it was only about the age of their respective families, and the glories of their honourable forebears.

The Duma recorder, Katoshichin, driven to distraction, had fled from old Moscow to Sweden where he wrote in his memoirs: "The boyars sit in the Duma without uttering a word and just stroke their beards, because they don't know how to think or how to speak."

Peter the Great dissolved this venerable conclave of old nobles, and for two hundred years the word "Duma" was mentioned only in learned theses, dealing with the czars of old. But the revolution had awakened in the people memories of that old institution. Meanwhile, however, in two hundred years of an absolute imperial Russia, the old noble families had died out. The city of Peter the Great neither witnessed arguments among the boyars nor did it know the pride in ancestry. In 1905, the year of storm and stress, the old word "Duma" assumed new form and meaning when the "Czar's Duma" changed into the "State Duma." The boyars of this Duma, to be sure, were little inclined merely to stroke their beards and look upon their Czar in humble awe.

The "State's Duma" held their meetings in the old, half-forgotten Taurida Palace. Prince Gregor Potemkin, Tauridian lover of the Great Catherine, had erected this palace as a monument to his glory, his

power, and his dignity. The great column-studded hall had been the scene of picturesque balls given by the Tauridian prince. It had been there that Catherine had danced ; there, too, she had discussed with Potemkin her plans for the conquest of Asiatic steppes and European cities.

The glory that had been Potemkin's seemingly passed on to the members of the Duma. During chaotic proceedings, excited speeches, and rebellious resolutions, they imagined themselves to be the collective heirs of the powerful prince. Following his example, they endeavoured to enforce their will upon the highest authority of the realm, intoxicated as they were from the acclaim of the multitude in the streets of St. Petersburg. True, the palace in which the Duma met had been Potemkin's once. But the power of the Duma was not unlike those " Villages of Potemkin " which the Tauridian prince had made of cardboard in conquered provinces to demonstrate to the Empress the blessings of his administration. This time, not an Empress, but the Duma itself was impressed by the false glamour of " Potemkian villages."

While the Government put such world-shaking questions before the Duma as to whether the University of Dorpat should be granted a new hothouse, deputies demanded a general amnesty of all political prisoners as well as an immediate expropriation of land and the organization of a ministry responsible to the Duma, and not to the monarch.

The ministers were aghast and incensed at the audacity of the Duma. Minister of Finance Kokovzov, feared that Russian securities, as a result of speeches in the Duma, would decline rapidly on the French exchanges. The young, newly appointed Minister of Interior, Peter Arkadieyevich Stolypin, submitted daily reports to the Czar, clipped from the provincial Press. Thus, he aimed to prove to the monarch that the revolution, scarcely under control, was liable to flare up again if the rebellious speeches of Duma deputies were permitted wide publicity.

Even as the ministers, more or less outspokenly, suggested the dissolution of the Duma to the Czar, the deputies argued the question whether the Czar should still be permitted to glory in the title of " Autocrat of All the Russias," and whether the Duma was authorized to block governmental credits. When old Goremykin read a governmental statement to the Duma on the 13th of May, 1906, Deputy Nabokov rushed up to the rostrum and shouted : " The administrative authority should be subordinated to the legislative powers ! "

The desk of the Czar in Czarskoje Selo overflowed with the warnings of ministers and transcriptions of rebellious speeches made in the Duma. Nicholas read them all with his usual equanimity. He remained unresponsive to Goremykin's insinuating questions as well as to his most enticing hints. The Czar was convinced that his speech from the throne had left a lasting impression. All these revolutionary experiments appeared to him merely the first reaction of a natural exuberance

on the part of the Duma deputies. Presently, these provincial politicians would grasp the fact that the mechanics of government were far more intricate than they had ever imagined. "Never anticipate developments," the Czar lectured his ministers. "Even the most hopeless disease may pass through a miracle."

However, when the disease became aggravated and the miracle failed to occur, the Czar, as Father of the Country, resolved to speak a word of warning to the rebellious Duma democrats once more.

In his opinion, even the hardest-hearted Duma deputy would capitulate before the archaic phraseology of an imperial address. The resolution of the Czar to speak again to the Duma stirred the ministers. "A monarch," they told him, "should not permit the purple of his imperial cloak to become soiled by contact with the Duma rabble." Nicholas listened silently to their tactful protests. It was very difficult to dispute the wisdom of dozens of well-meaning reactionaries.

In the seclusion of his study, Nicholas ceaselessly sought to find a course which would not infringe upon the dignity of the crown yet would satisfy those childish rebels at the Taurida Palace. Just then, at the inception of the new era, he hesitated to make use of his prerogative to dissolve the Duma. "Perhaps," he reasoned, "it is wrong to lay all the blame at the feet of the Duma. After all, it must be rather difficult for those young people in the Duma to co-operate with such a fossil as Goremykin." And he recalled an adage by Pushkin: "Don't team up an ass with a timid doe." True, Goremykin was not exactly an ass nor the Duma precisely a timid doe; nevertheless, the warning was not to be ignored altogether.

In the marble halls of the palaces, courtiers could divine the innermost imperial thoughts from a fluttering of the Czar's eyelashes, from the way he furrowed his brow and smoked his cigarette, or by the sound of his tread on the parquet floor. The first to interpret the imperial mind, this time, was the Palace Commandant, Trepov.

The staggering events of 1905 had not succeeded in changing the brave Palace Commandant to any marked degree. Trepov still judged politics and world history from the smug viewpoint of a glorified castellan, in the fortunate position of bringing his opinions and cogitations directly before his imperial master.

The possibility that the Duma might be dissolved harassed the officious Palace Commandant like a nightmare. Should the Duma actually be prorogued, how was he to protect St. Petersburg—including the Palace Square and its highly polished window panes—against the destructive repercussions of terrorists' bombs? In order to be prepared for such an emergency, the cautious Trepov had arranged for a torpedo-boat flotilla to be held in readiness. Then, should the necessity arise, it would be possible to convey the all-highest family, entrusted to his care, to a safe, foreign port.

In view of all the complications which might arise from a dissolution of the Duma, possibilities of forming a Liberal ministry appeared to the anxious Trepov as a veritable inspiration from on high. Time and

again Nicholas had to listen to the suggestions of the Palace Commandant. His list of candidates for a responsible Liberal ministry reposed on the Czar's desk for many days. The monarch was well acquainted with the names of Miljukov, Nabokov, and other Liberal politicians. To be sure, these men were astute, educated, and experienced. However, they completely lacked genuine understanding of the real meaning of czarism and of the *mushiks'* fervent faith in it; nor could they appreciate that supernatural element which alone guaranteed the existence of czar and realm.

Nicholas was fully aware of the heavy burden of work and responsibility imposed upon him, rendered all the more exacting because he considered it a responsibility to God rather than to his subjects. In the eyes of God, no constitution, no ministry, and no solemn assurance could lighten his burden! Indeed, the Czar reasoned, the more he permitted the people to relieve him of his cares, the greater would be his responsibility to the Almighty.

At any rate, an attempt could be made. During one of the usual weekly reports the Czar showed his Minister of Finance, Kokovzov, the list of candidates for a Liberal ministry as compiled by Trepov. "I beg of you," said the ruler, "to let me have your opinion regarding these suggestions. It will not be necessary for you to restrain yourself in the least in expressing your views on the matter. I want you to tell me honestly what you think of it."

Kokovzov quaked as he read the list. As a trained official, he immediately foresaw what would probably happen if the Czar actually entrusted the Government apparatus to these young Liberals.

"Your Majesty," he ventured, "it is easy enough to appoint ministers, but very difficult, at times, to dismiss them." Then, quietly and impressively, he discoursed on the dignity of the monarch, the childish stupidities of the Duma, and respect for the law.

After the Minister had finished, the Czar arose and said gravely: "Much of what you say I know to be true from long experience and observation. However, I prefer to listen to divergent views and I never reject anything immediately. Naturally, it distresses me to hear opinions which destroy the fondest hopes of my life. But believe me I shall not resort to any measures for which I cannot assume responsibility before my conscience."

Rumours that a Liberal Government was imminent continued to harass the ministers for a long time to come. Old Goremykin was the only one who refused to become excited. All such rumours he brushed aside with the remark: "That's all nonsense. The Czar never will do it, and, if he does, nothing will come of it anyhow."

Goremykin had resolved to crown his long official career with a masterly dissolution of the Duma. That accomplished, he could crawl back into his camphor chest, well satisfied. To this end, he incessantly dinned into the Czar's ear that it was absolutely impossible to co-operate with the Duma. But not before the Duma actually transgressed on the wording of the law did the Czar permit its dissolution.

On Friday, the 6th of July, all ministers were invited to assemble in Goremykin's official quarters. Nobody surmised what had prompted the Prime Minister to convene the Council. The ministers had to wait long for old Goremykin because he was with the Czar at Czarskoje Selo. At last, at nine o'clock in the evening, the door opened, and to the ministers' unbounded amazement they beheld an utterly changed Goremykin. His usually bleary eyes now flashed fire, his pale cheeks were flushed, and his wrinkled face radiated joy. With springy, almost youthful, steps, Goremykin approached his visitors, exclaiming: "*Ça y est !* Congratulate me, gentlemen, on the greatest favour which our ruler ever could confer upon me. I have been relieved of the duties of Prime Minister. Stolypin will be my successor."

The bewildered ministers crowded around Goremykin. "And the Duma?" they demanded excitedly.

Goremykin waved his hand. "Seventy-two days of Duma is more than enough," he assured them. "The Duma is to be dissolved to-morrow. It will be my last official act. Gentlemen, I feel exactly like a schoolboy going on vacation. I am off to bed now and you can do as you please. My successor will be here any minute, but I wish to be left alone!" With mincing steps he fairly danced out of the room.

Goremykin proved himself a worthy disciple of the art of government that typified the eighteenth century. As soon as he had held the Czar's dissolution decree in his hand, he and Stolypin began concentrating the most dependable troops in the neighbourhood of Taurida Palace. Inconspicuously, the military occupied all the important thoroughfares of the city. At the same time the dissolution ukase was being printed to be posted throughout the city at six o'clock the following morning.

Goremykin had been extremely busy all day long; small wonder that by nightfall he was exceedingly weary. He therefore instructed his valet not to awaken him under any circumstances; nothing in the whole world could be important enough to disturb his well-earned slumber. This irresistible urge for undisturbed rest on the part of Goremykin, during the night from the 6th to the 7th of July, 1906, has become part and parcel of Russian history. The shrewd old man knew exactly when and why to insist upon uninterrupted sleep.

Next morning there was talk among the courtiers of a messenger from the Czar who had knocked at Goremykin's door during the night. The well-trained valet had sent him back together with his brief-case. Rumour had it that the brief-case contained the imperial order to postpone the dissolution of the Duma. All this seemed to be borne out by the fact that when Goremykin appeared at the breakfast-table next morning he smiled craftily as one who had reason to congratulate himself. The art of government of the eighteenth century had scored a new victory.

The dissolution of the Duma proceeded very quietly with no untoward event. Troops occupied the square in front of Taurida Palace since early in the morning and the deputies were confronted by locked

doors. The dissolution did not create any strong impression either in the capital city or in the provinces. The manifesto of a number of deputies, who assembled in Vyborg on the day of dissolution and exhorted the people to refuse payment of taxes and military service, did not yield any result. Russian securities in the Paris exchange rose, and the publisher of the *Almanach de Gotha* for 1907 took cognizance of the strange development in Russian history with the brief but striking notation: "*Russie, empire constitutionnel sous un tsar autocrate.*"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### STOLYPIN

PETER ARKADIEVITCH STOLYPIN, successor to old Goremykin, was forty-four years old when the Czar entrusted the fate of the realm to him. The alabaster face of the Minister was framed by a dark, square-cut beard. His deep-set eyes flashed with enormous energy. It was he who shouted at the unruly members of the second Duma the famous sentence: "You seek to create tremendous upheavals, but we seek to create a powerful Russia!" On that day those who were present had the feeling that, in Stolypin, the vigorous Russian province at last had sent the Czar a real saviour.

Stolypin was a newcomer on the smooth parquet floors of St. Petersburg palaces. Scion of provincial nobility, he was far more at ease in the little huts of the Russian *mushik* than in the *salons*, clubs and bureaux of the imperial capital. First Marshal of the Nobility in Lithuania, then Governor of Grodno and Saratov, Stolypin's career was that of an average official until the stormy year of 1905. Then, the Czar ran across calm and concise commentaries from Stolypin's hand in the midst of a mass of chaotic governmental reports.

Transplanted from the provincial Volga region to St. Petersburg Stolypin brought along not only plans for reforms, conceived on a grand style, but a naive ignorance of St. Petersburg ways as well. In his eyes, the ranks of Liberal politicians and aristocrats appeared to be a suitable reservoir for furnishing the Empire with fresh talent. Thus, when the Czar offered him the post of Prime Minister, Stolypin decided to invite the co-operation of Liberal politicians. However, with the bombs of the terrorists threatening the life of each minister, the Liberal aristocrats, panic-stricken with dread, evinced scant enthusiasm for the dignity of a ministerial post. Stolypin's negotiations with the Liberal intelligentsia came to naught, and again, just as in the year 1905, an avalanche of assassinations and murders struck the Russian Empire.

To their surprise, the Liberal circles in Russia discovered that the same minister who, a short time ago, had wooed the co-operation of the Liberals, now revealed an entirely different face. Stolypin proclaimed over numerous provinces—even over entire regions—a state resembling martial law. Every infraction of the law, every political contravention was brought before field courts martial, exclusively consisting of army officers, who could decree only one sentence: Death! Gallows arose all over the country. Within a short time, 3500 death sentences were executed. The revolution was throttled by

what one Duma deputy described before a field court martial as "Stolypin's garrotte." Before long, "Stolypin's garrotte" became the byword of the revolution.

While the public gleefully received news of the assassination of generals and governors, Leo Tolstoy raised his stentorian voice against "Stolypin's garrotte." With the sovereign right of an inspired poet, he wrote: "It really would be best if they would throw a white hood over me, as over these peasants; if they would plunge me off the board, too, so that my own weight would tighten the soaped rope around my old neck and strangle me." Tolstoy's words, like a voice in the wilderness, fell upon Stolypin's deaf ears.

The Prime Minister paid even less attention to the proceedings of the second Duma. As radical as the first, it had begun its legislative labours on the 6th of March, 1907. Stolypin, with his tightly buttoned black coat, his pale face, and his all too calm demeanour, infuriated the Duma as a red rag infuriates a bull. "Murderer! Hangman!" the deputies shouted, and nobody knew whether their words were meant for the Minister or for the Czar himself. In reply, Stolypin shook his fist and admonished the deputies: "The bloody nightmare has not yet passed, but the Government is resolved to combat it."

The Social-Democratic deputies, accustomed to fighting czarism with knife and revolver, were inclined to continue their activities under the protection of parliamentary immunity. Soon the police ascertained that forty-five Social-Democratic Duma deputies, under the guidance of their leader Osol, were involved in extensive revolutionary conspiracies, aiming at the assassination of the Czar, the Grand-duke Nicholas Nicholaievitch, and Stolypin. United by the strong bond of revolutionary blood brotherhood, the Duma refused to surrender the indicted deputies to the Government. Thereupon, Stolypin decided to oppose the united will of the Duma with the full power of imperial autocracy.

A ukase of the 16th of June dissolved the second Duma. Another abolished the electoral law, replacing it with a new one which barred revolutionary circles in the populace from exerting suffrage. Witte's constitution broke down under Stolypin's assault. The *coup d'état* succeeded, and when the third Duma assembled on the 15th of November, 1907, the Government was assured of a complacent majority.

But although Stolypin dissolved the Duma, strangled revolutionaries with his garrotte, and executed a *coup d'état*, he manifested clearly that he was not merely the Czar's ferocious watchdog, as public opinion considered him. In the quiet of his study, far away from the noise of the Duma, Stolypin developed a plan which was to restore the upset balance of domestic politics, once and for all.

With the experienced eye of the landowner, Stolypin recognized that the Russian peasant constituted the chief cause of all revolts, assassinations, and conspiracies. Exhibiting the same energy he had shown in attacking the revolution, Stolypin now approached the agrarian problem.

Again, as an experienced landowner, he knew the troubles and desires of the peasantry far better than Slavophile old men and revolutionary youths in the palaces of St. Petersburg. The core of his reforms was to be the abolition of the *obshtshina* and the liberation of the *mushiks* from the shackles of peasantry laws. Stolypin looked upon the *mushik*—at last released from the chains of the *mir*, at last proprietor of his own soil—as an infinitely more dependable ally in his battle against the revolution than all other classes and strata of the realm. Supported by millions of independent and satisfied *mushiks*, the monarchy would victoriously resist all storms of revolution for centuries hence.

To be sure, Stolypin directed his reforms merely toward a small, carefully selected group. He would grant free land only to the best and most industrious *mushiks*; they alone would benefit by agrarian credits and civil laws. "My law," Stolypin explained, "is exclusively for the good *mushik*, not for lazy, weak and inefficient peasants. The hard-working and useful *mushik*, representing the very salt of Russian earth, is to be given an opportunity to liberate himself from the yoke of present conditions."

The ukase concerning this agrarian reform, promulgated on the 9th of November, 1906, was approved at the first session of the third Duma, thus establishing a class of peasant-proprietors. For the first time the better element of *mushiks* now saw a possibility to escape the pressure of aristocratic and imperial tutelage, carving a free existence for themselves.

With tooth and nail the *mushiks* clung to this new law. In the course of three years Stolypin distributed 8,780,000 deciatines of land among eleven per cent of the entire Russian peasantry. To strengthen the new pillars of the Empire, 12,410,932 gold roubles were advanced on agrarian loans, while another 9,230,725 gold roubles were expended for non-repayable financial assistance.

While those *mushiks* who had not participated in the blessings of the reform emigrated to the cities to become industrial labourers, or sank into abysmal poverty, the wealth of the agricultural regions grew enormously. Within a few years the extent of arable land in certain neighbourhoods increased by fifty-five per cent—in some regions even by seventy-five per cent—with the new owners, the *kulaks*, rapidly developing into the most fervent protectors of imperial power.

The revolutionaries greeted Stolypin's reform with cat-calls, whistling and booing. Lenin referred to it as Agrar-Bonapartism. Almost all the Russian revolutionary factions thundered against Stolypin's "plunder of the *obshtshina*." Their reason could easily be traced to a declaration of the Congress of Social-Revolutionaries, which had met in London in September, 1906. It had warned that "the Government, after having suppressed open rebellion and attempts at revolutionary expropriation of land, now has decided to squash the revolutionary impetus of the peasantry by introducing private property. Every success of the Government along these lines is a blow to the revolution."

The Government's victory was overwhelming. Within the first six months Stolypin's reforms created 500,000 rich, independent *kulaks*. With the same fervour with which they once had yearned for the acreage of the landowners, the peasant-proprietors now stood ready to defend this land—and the Czar, who had given it to them—against the revolutionaries.

Viewing his success with pride, Stolypin failed to observe that his revolutionary enemies were being joined by those who feared that his reforms would eventually jeopardize the aristocratic landowners. Displaying the same hatred with which they formerly had pursued Witte, agrarian circles now pointed to Stolypin as the "Grand Vizier" who intended to usurp the power of the crown.

Nevertheless, Stolypin's power grew, and with it grew the hatred of the political reactionaries. When Stolypin submitted to the State's Council of the Duma his plan providing for agrarian representation of the nine south-western governments, the opposition resolved to give battle. In all secrecy two reactionary members of the State's Council, Trepov and Durnovo, called upon the Czar to acquaint him with their apprehensions regarding the imperious minister's proposed measures.

"Alexander III would have promptly thrown out these people," was the Dowager-Empress's contemptuous remark when she heard of the visit. Nicholas II, however, did not show them the door; he remained silent, but the two knew how to interpret the imperial silence. Subsequently the votes of ten reactionary members in the State's Council brought about the rejection of Stolypin's proposed law.

The infuriated Stolypin appeared before the Czar with his resignation in his pocket. But Nicholas, shuddering at the very idea, declined to dismiss him. Perceiving the Czar's reluctance, Stolypin promptly concluded that he was irreplaceable and assumed that he could force his will upon the monarch. He therefore demanded a three-day suspension of the State's Council and the Duma so that he might enforce, during this time, his plan for agrarian representation by means of emergency laws.

The Czar was amazed by the categorical tone in which Stolypin made his suggestions. He regarded the Minister in bewilderment, and finally remarked: "Very well. Since I do not wish to lose your services, I agree to this extraordinary measure."

Following up his advantage, Stolypin quickly added: "Besides, Your Majesty, I beg that those persons who behaved so ignominiously should receive official reprimands."

At these words the Czar's eyes held a baffling, far-away expression. At last, in the manner of one awakening from a long dream, Nicholas inquired, in icy accents: "Just what is it you want me to do?"

Stolypin demanded that Trepov and Durnovo be expelled from the capital city.

"I fully understand, Peter Arkadievitch," the Czar said, suddenly cordial once more, and he warmly pressed Stolypin's hand.

Immensely gratified, the Minister departed. Little did he know

that the Czar's handshake presaged his eventual doom. Nicholas II never could forgive an ultimatum.

The Czar only then realized that his Minister's will, in a truly uncanny fashion, had cast a gigantic shadow over his imperial soul. Like the Czarina, he feared Stolypin's dictatorship might darken the glory of imperial power. And although the Czar, under certain conditions, was willing to submit to another's will for a time, the Empress never would make concessions. From that day onward her displeasure pursued Stolypin. More and more the Minister found himself inescapably caught in the web of ever-increasing imperial disfavour.

Intoxicated with his power, Stolypin, in 1907, made the statement : "In another twenty-five years Russia will be the richest and most tranquil country in the world." But of these twenty-five years, God and the Czar granted the Minister only four.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### THE HEIR

SIX months after Stolypin's appointment, the Czar had written to his Minister: "In you I have found an extraordinary executor of My will." But these gracious words of the monarch had been set down in great weariness. The stormy years of the revolution had changed Nicholas vastly. When the battalions of revolutionaries had marched against czarist power the first time, Nicholas had smiled and said: "*Cela me chatouille.*"—(This makes me laugh.) However, he smiled no longer and had aged visibly. His hair was thinning; a sad expression had crept into his eyes; and melancholy lines were drawn around his mouth.

Numerous attempts on his life had forced him to restrict his customary walks to an ever-increasing extent. Incensed over the eternal safety measures hedging him in, he once wrote to the Dowager-Empress: "I hope you will understand what life has become for me, dear Mother. There is no chance for me to go horseback riding, no possibility to drive anywhere. And to think that this happens in one's own home, right in quiet Peterhof! I am disgusted with my country and am filled with shame as I write this. It makes me indignant to think that this state of affairs should prevail in the very neighbourhood of St. Petersburg."

The Czar came to regard his own life, more and more, as a series of trials and developments which, in their entirety, expressed the will of God with remarkable clarity. The attempted assassination in Japan, the catastrophe at Borki, and even the revolution were all accepted by the Czar as visible proof that Providence meant to save him for something momentous.

Acutely conscious of his God-imposed position, even now, after a thirteen-years' reign, Nicholas refused to court the good-will of his subjects. It was not he who should seek their favour; rather, the people, living by his imperial grace, must strain every effort to show themselves worthy of his regard.

The hatred of the intellectuals left the Czar cold. Once, when the Senate suggested that the whipping-post—still employed under the peasantry law—be abolished, he wrote: "I shall put an end to this institution when it suits me!" When it was explained that this and similar decisions were creating an undesirable impression upon the populace, the Czar replied in annoyance: "What do I care for public opinion?"

However, when Stolypin began to introduce his agrarian reforms, Nicholas decided to furnish proof of the close bond uniting him with

the best element of his people. With a single stroke of the pen he presented to the *mushiks* the greatest part of the enormous tracts of land owned by the imperial family. And while the surprised granddukes discussed the unfathomable ways of monarchical grace, the Czar's thoughts were centred exclusively on the noble right of a ruler to share his very last with the poor of his realm.

Back in 1584, when the boyar, Boris Godunov, was elected Czar, he strode from the Moscow Kremlin into Red Square, stripped off his shirt, embroidered with diamonds, and shouted: "Verily, even my last shirt shall I give to the poor!" The echo of these words still reverberated in Nicholas's soul. In the east of Russia the monarch's private property comprised the immeasurable Altai region. Disregarding all plans proposed by his Court Minister, Nicholas II handed over the entire area to poor Russian peasants despite the fact that his own fortune, and that of his family, was reduced considerably by this measure.

Money meant no more to the Russian Czar than the sands on the shores of Livadia. While the Czarina displayed typical German thrift in all questions concerning finance, the Czar always acted as a true heir of the richest and mightiest monarchs of the world. His disdain for money was so intense that he even disliked to have any contact with currency. Not so much as the smallest coin could ever be found in his pockets. When he played dominoes with his officers, he consistently had to ask the Czarina, or one of his daughters, to make good his losses.

The Czar, however, was saving and exacting in all personal matters. According to his mind, material self-limitation was the necessary and outstanding characteristic of a Russian ruler. Nicholas II lived far more modestly than most of his ministers, yet the Czar's annual expenditures reached the colossal sum of twenty million roubles. "For any private person, even the most extravagant one," Grandduke Alexander writes, "such an amount would have constituted an enormous figure. Nevertheless this sum was not at all out of proportion to the demands imposed upon the Emperor."

Appanages of the granddukes, contribution to charity, salaries for officials and presents, absorbed the largest part of the annual imperial income. Although the Czar spent only two weeks at the Winter Palace every year, it was necessary to maintain no less than 1200 servants there for the entire twelvemonth. In Czarskoje Selo 660 lackeys were employed. The Czar contributed two million roubles every year for the arts, and the same sum was expended upon private charities. On her wedding day, every grandduchess received a gift of one million roubles from the Czar. After salaries, presents, subsidies for the theatre and for learned academies had been deducted from the twenty million roubles, only two hundred thousand remained to cover the Czar's actual personal expenses.

The Czar imagined that in the same measure in which he distributed his terrestrial treasures among his people, he would share in the celestial abundance of grace one day. It was his belief that one's deeds

were merely an expression of an invisible Divine Will, guiding every feeling and every action of mortal man.

When the Ministers' Council submitted a long report to the Czar for the reform of laws affecting Jewry, Nicholas wrote to Stolypin : " I herewith reject your suggestions, although your arguments are completely convincing, and doubtless speak for their acceptance. However, an inner voice warns me that I must not make this decision. This inner voice never has misled me and I therefore shall follow it again. I know that you, too, believe that the Czar's heart rests in the hollow of God's hand. So be it ! For the power which I exert I incur tremendous responsibility before God, but I am ready, at all times, to assume it."

Diurnal imperial labours gradually developed into strange spectral meditations. With the same fervour with which the Czar formerly had asked his adviser : " What would my father have done ? " he now asked himself : " What does God want me to do ? " In the face of this inner, metaphysically conceived, voice, all logical objections came to naught.

In Nicholas's consciousness Czar and God faced each other. They were connected by an invisible bridge, and it was across this bridge that God would project His mercy as well as His wrath. With the same selfless humility with which his subjects were expected to submit to the Czar's mercy and wrath, the Czar, in turn, was ready to submit to the mercy and wrath of God.

It was in the thirteenth year of Nicholas's reign that the cup of God's wrath was emptied upon him. Like the patient sufferer Job, Nicholas bowed before the wrath of the Almighty. He bore the cross which God had imposed upon him silently. Not one complaint came from his lips, for when God tries His Anointed One human words must cease. The cross of the Czar was embodied in the desperately longed-for and incessantly prayed-for Czarevitch Alexius.

The heir to the Russian throne was scarcely six months old when grave physical symptoms became discernible on his body. It was on Wednesday, the 21st of September, 1904, shortly before Czar and Czarina were to leave for morning mass, that blood suddenly spurted from the child's navel. The imperial private physician, Korovin, and the imperial private surgeon, Fjodorov, were summoned in all haste but neither of them could, or would, explain the reason for the strange hæmorrhage.

Three years passed. One day the little Czarevitch skipped across a pebble-strewn lane at Czarskoje Selo. Suddenly he stumbled, fell, and, his face disfigured with pain, remained prostrate on the ground. His knees and thighs were drenched in blood. The Empress swooned when she beheld the body of her son. She did not have to consult physicians to learn what ailed him. Her brother and two of her nephews had died of hæmophilia, that strange, incurable, and hereditary disease to which—almost exclusively—only male members of a family are subject. Even healthy daughters of such families frequently transfer this fearful

tendency to male offspring. In those afflicted with hæmophilia the condition of the vessels does not permit blood to coagulate and even the smallest injury can bring about fatal hæmorrhages. The life of such a "bleeder" is one of permanent danger and martyrdom. Anywhere and always, with each step, whether at play or at work—even during sleep—danger threatens. Any hasty movement or vigorous gesture may usher in catastrophe. No enemy, no fiend, no torturer could have invented worse punishment for the imperial couple than the incurable illness of the Czarevitch. To his parents he not only represented the very personification of the dynasty, but a pledge for their own future as well as that of the realm.

The Czar filled the rooms of his son with the most expensive and intricate toys. There were electric railway trains, automatic dolls, entire armies of mechanical tin soldiers, and models of cities and churches. Continually supervised by anxious attendants, the handsome delicate child would play with these marvellous contraptions. A light pressure of his finger was sufficient to make the bells of the toy churches ring, send the tiny soldiers to war, and dispatch the electrical locomotives along the tracks.

But to what avail were all these mechanical toys when his body-guard, the gigantic sailor, Derevenko, stood beside the boy incessantly, watching his every movement; when he was neither permitted to run, jump, or go horseback riding. In every corner of every room on every occasion, parents and servants would raise their voices in warning: "Alexius, do be careful!"

The life of the Czarina, too, became one of permanent martyrdom. Lashed by despair, the unfortunate woman could never forget even for a moment, that, inadvertently, she was the cause of all this agony. The poor child's future seemed shrouded in deepest gloom. The more dangerous the attacks the Czarevitch suffered, the more his mother felt it her duty to provide for his future. If she had not given physical health to her son, at least, she must endeavour to retain for him the crown of the realm, its glamour undiminished.

The disease of the Czarevitch, then, accounted for the Czarina's purposeful and active part in politics. In the past, she had worried about her husband's power; now, her political endeavours were imbued with the strength of a mother's love and the bitterness of a mother's hurt pride. She resolved to offset the child's physical shortcomings with the mighty splendour of autocracy, destined to be his one day.

Like a cloud presaging disaster, the wrath of the Almighty hovered over the imperial palace. Harried by ceaseless anxiety over the Czarevitch, the imperial couple renounced all external pomp and secluded themselves from the world. Duties of representation, which already had been reduced to a minimum, now were neglected almost completely.

Plagued by a feeling of guilt, the Czarina hid from outsiders. Indeed, she became so despondent that those who saw her, around that time,

were inclined to think they noticed symptoms of a psychological decline. The excruciating agonies the Czarina suffered presently manifested themselves physiologically in the form of a serious kidney ailment. She also became a victim of painful, nervous heart and stomach spasms which often required her to spend days, even weeks, stretched upon her divan, staring ahead vacantly.

While Court circles considered the Czarina's behaviour hysterical, the same clique criticized the Emperor for his remarkable equanimity.

"The Czar is indifferent and an optimist to boot," declared one of the courtiers who had waited, in vain, for a sign of imperial despair.

Nobody, however, surmised how great was the Czar's self-control and with what, almost superhuman, stoicism he could face imminent disaster.

Slowly Stolypin advanced through the overcrowded auditorium. A centre seat in the first row, between General Trepov and Court Minister Frederiks, had been reserved for him ; behind him, in the second row, sat General Kurlov.

"Has that terrorist woman been apprehended?" the Minister inquired of the General.

"Not yet, Your Excellency."

"Please see about it without delay," Stolypin ordered impatiently and arose from his seat for, just then, he observed the Czar stepping into the imperial box. The audience cheered, and while the curtains rose slowly the orchestra struck up "God save the Czar."

The performance began. The Minister was in deep thought. Apparently the melodious arias of *The Tale of Czar Saltan* hardly reached his ear. The Czar, too, appeared abstracted, for his glances roved all over the auditorium. Only the two imperial daughters, Olga and Tatiana, seemed enchanted by the splendour of the scene. Their heads—the one blonde, the other black—were close together. With eyes that were nigh popping they followed the adventures of the young prince, who even then was seized by his despicable aunts, placed in a barrel, and thrown into the sea.

During the first intermission Stolypin arose and leaned back against the railing which separated the auditorium from the orchestra pit. His face turned toward the audience, he conversed with Court Minister Frederiks and Count Josef Potocki.

A man in a tail-coat in the twelfth row stood up and pushed towards the aisle. He was Secret Service Detective Bagrov. He started for the stage, only to hesitate at the second row where a seat had been reserved for General Kurlov. He looked around, his eye finally resting on the Prime Minister. This time, however, it was not a camera which he focused upon Stolypin, but the shining barrel of a revolver. Two tiny clouds of smoke arose while the reverberation of the shots were quickly swallowed up by the general noise pervading the overcrowded auditorium.

There was a single loud scream, followed by deadly silence. Stolypin remained standing. Slowly he bent his head and, in obvious surprise, stared at a red spot suddenly spreading on his white uniform. He placed his cap and gloves on the railing behind him and clutched the back of a chair with his left hand. His voice rang out loudly and clearly : "I am happy to die for the Czar." Nicholas stood erect in the imperial box, like a soldier at attention. Stolypin's dying glance was glued upon the Czar's figure. In a last gesture he raised his right hand, blessing the Czar with a broad Byzantine cross. Then he toppled to the ground.

Nicholas remained standing in the box, as if paralysed by the dying man's benediction. And while Bagrov was taken away, and while the mortally wounded Stolypin was carried out, the auditorium, first softly, then louder and louder, was filled with hysterical cheering for the Czar. People jumped upon their seats until presently the enormous

hall reverberated with thundering huzzas. Sharply delineated against the red velvet background of the imperial box, the motionless figure of the Czar appeared like that of an old god of fire who has just received his high priest in sacrifice. In a dim corner of the box the young Grandduchess Olga was shaken by hysterical sobs.

By special order of the Czar, the great military parade scheduled for the following day at Ovrutch, near Kiev, was not cancelled. Shortly before the review the Czar went to the hospital, but he was not admitted to Stolypin's room. In the antechamber he met a woman, her eyes red from weeping, wringing her hands. She was Olga Borisovna, the Prime Minister's wife. Recognizing the Czar, she arose and, with utmost dignity, approached the monarch.

"There still are men like Susanin in Russia, Your Majesty," she said, "ready to die so that their Czar might live."

Nicholas, startled, retreated.

Another parade, at Tchernigov, also was held in accordance with the schedule. On the same day—the 18th of September, 1911—at ten o'clock in the evening, Peter Arkadieivitch Stolypin, Prime Minister of Russia, died in the hospital of Doctor Makovsky. On the 19th of September, in the presence of the Czar, a solemn high mass of requiem was celebrated. The Czar, however, could not attend the interment of his loyal servant because an excited telegram from the Czarina summoned him to the Crimea.

A few days after the assassination the murderer Bagrov was put to death. Dark rumours surrounded the execution. The trial had been held behind closed doors. There were people who insisted that Bagrov, to the very last, confidently had expected his release. When taken to the gallows by the hangman, he reputedly shouted: "What do you want of me? I acted by order of the police!"

The investigation regarding the implication of the police in the assassination of Stolypin never was concluded. By order of the Czar, the case was dropped and the secret of Stolypin's murder was to remain unsolved.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### THE GOLDEN CAGE

**S**ILENCE—deep and terrifying—pervaded the Czar's palace in Kiev. Lackeys tiptoed through the halls; the triple guard at the door hardly dared to draw breath; generals of the imperial entourage crept about like disembodied spirits. In hushed voices they discussed the tragic events which marked the ill-fated reign of Nicholas II. Stolypin had just been assassinated; prior to him, Sipjagin and Grandduke Sergius had fallen victim to the terrorists. Old Pobedonostsev was dead, and Count Witte had been erased from the memory of the monarch for ever. In fact, no statesmen were left any longer, only "officials." Until the break of dawn, loyal servants of the Czar debated the all-important question: Who would take the place of the murdered Prime Minister, in turn facing the death-dealing weapons of the terrorists?

On the day of the requiem for his Prime Minister, Nicholas II stood on the platform of the Kiev railway station. Rain fell in torrents. A military band played "God Save the Czar"; its solemn notes drowned the ceaseless drumming of the rain.

The imperial special train drew up. Two minutes before his departure Nicholas suddenly remembered that Russia had no Prime Minister. To be sure, it made little difference whom he would appoint successor to Stolypin because, after all, he, the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, was still there. As Nicholas turned, his eye fell upon the gold-braided uniform and the grave mien of his Minister of Finance Kokovzov, nicknamed Koko in Court circles. The Minister of Finance was exceedingly well informed regarding manipulations of foreign exchange and the placing of foreign loans, but had given little thought to politics.

Nicholas extended his hand to the Minister of Finance. "Let me congratulate you, Kokovzov," he said in a low voice. "I herewith appoint you my Prime Minister."

As the train pulled out, the monarch beheld the blanched face of his new Prime Minister. Then, his eyes fixed on the white, blue and red flags drooping sadly at half-mast, the Czar brought his hand to his forehead in a smart military salute. The Stolypin episode was concluded.

The Czarina awaited her consort at the Livadia railway station. As the carriage of the imperial couple rolled through the lanes of soldiers, lining the streets, the Czarina said softly, as if in reverie: "We never should feel sorry for those who have passed on. Each of us must fulfil

a certain task. If someone has passed on it simply means that he has fulfilled his specific mission and nothing further remains for him to do."

The Czar kept silent. His eyes were glued upon the blue Crimean mountain range, clearly delineated against the far horizon. Clouds were gathering around the summit of Ai-Petri. Presently the clouds and the ragged summit assumed strange forms, recalling to the Czar the face of Mme Stolypin, swollen from weeping. What was it she had said? "There still are men like Susanin in Russia, Your Majesty. . . ."

The name of Susanin evoked childhood memories in the Czar. Before his mind's eye appeared a garish old print depicting a historical scene. The print, reminiscent of a stuffy classroom, was completely lacking in artistic taste. Its subject was Ivan Susanin, a *mushik* with the blue eyes of an innocent child and the venerable white beard of a patriarch. Susanin's hands were piously folded; his gaze concentrated upon the heavens. In the year 1613 this *mushik*, Susanin, had led a band of Polish assassins into the thick underbrush of the Nordic forest. The band was searching for the Ipatiev monastery where the first Romanov, youthful Michael, was in hiding. The swampy woods became more and more fearsome. The desperate Poles demanded of the *mushik*: "Where is the monastery?"

Raising his eyes heavenward, Susanin shouted: "There is no escape for you out of this swamp. You will never find the Czar. I led you astray to save my Czar. Go now, slay me!"

Whenever Glinka's *Life for the Czar* was sung in the Imperial Opera House in St. Petersburg the officers of the Guard, filling the pit, would jump up and applaud wildly the very second the Poles rushed at the loyal Susanin. Glinka's opera had always been the favourite of the imperial family.

Stolypin's coffin and the swollen red face of his wife vanished from the Czar's memory. His fingers drumming an accompaniment, the monarch hummed Susanin's aria: "How could I ever fear to die, I die for Czar and God."

Susanin had fulfilled his task. His death had ushered in the three-hundred year rule of the Romanovs. Perhaps Stolypin's death, too, was merely another link in the long chain of events decreed by God in His wisdom? Surely, a monarch must graciously accept the sacrifices of his subjects when they were made for the weal of the country! . . .

The blazing sun, the stirring air of the regimental bands, the trim figures of officers and soldiers, brought the Czar back to reality. At the gate of the castle he reviewed the Crimean corps, warmly pressing the hand of their general, the Georgian Dumbadse.

At Castle Livadia, life again assumed its old idyllic trend with the Czar sauntering along the shore, and the children romping in the sand. It was during that time that Nicholas wrote to his old friend, Prince Meshtshersky: "Down here, I feel strong and rested, as always in

the life-giving Crimea. Dips in the sea, walks, and, above all, a feeling of freedom, lengthen life by many, many months."

The freedom which the Czar so enjoyed in the Crimea was rather limited, to be sure. From the roof of the square, alabaster-white observation tower of the new Livadia Palace, the Czar could not fail to notice the cordon of troops, stationed by General Dumbadse at strategic points on the outskirts of the imperial estate. At the break of dawn each morning, soldiers searched every square foot of the imperial park. Every evening General Dumbadse, not unlike a bloodhound scenting prey, trotted up and down the lanes, sniffing for powder, infernal machines, and bombs. Throughout the day the fixed triple-edged bayonets of the soldiers gleamed in the sun like so many fiery exclamation marks. From time to time the Chief of Secret Police called upon the Czar to implore him—his voice vibrating with anxiety, his face expressing utmost concern—not to venture into certain parts of the park. While Nicholas enjoyed dips in the Caspian Sea, played with the children, or relaxed in the sun, his generals were visibly losing weight, their cheeks appearing more hollow each day. Silently, nervously, casting apprehensive glances everywhere, they patrolled the lanes of the park. Unquestionably, solicitude for the Anointed One imposed a heavy burden upon his entourage.

The cordon of troops that surrounded the monarch, the incessant warnings, the apprehensive glances of his Court—all served to pain Nicholas. It weighed upon him that his life must be saved anew every minute of each hour. After all, the life of The Most Orthodox Czar was not merely protected by the fixed bayonets of his soldiers, but was guarded by God's Omnipotence! Nicholas was firmly convinced that he would live just as long as his terrestrial tasks awaited fulfilment. Not before he could leave a united, tranquillized and rehabilitated realm to a strong heir to the throne would his duty be performed.

Reclining beside the shore of the Caspian Sea, the Czar felt a keen desire to show these "parade generals" of his that it was the grace of God and not they who protected his person.

Thus, one morning, at the early hour of four o'clock, the Czar of All the Russias left his bed. Cautiously he sneaked out of his chamber. In a closet of his dressing-room, he discovered the uniform of a simple soldier of the First Siberian Regiment of Chasseurs. Donning the uniform, the Czar walked out of the palace unnoticed. He passed the guards and soon set foot on forbidden territory.

Elated, Nicholas swung along the green meadow, his eyes fixed upon the rising sun. Perhaps, at that moment, he thought of his great forebear, Alexander I, who had overpowered Napoleon. Had not Alexander, too, left his palace in the Crimea in December, 1825, disguised in the rags of a beggar? He, too, had walked towards the sun until he had reached the boundless forests of Siberia. There, secluded from the world, Alexander had spent his remaining days in prayer and penance.

The mystic life of Alexander I was but a prelude to the tragic life



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COUNT WITTE, APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER IN 1905



of Nicholas II. Both lived under the spell of omnipotence, and both searched for God's answer in solitary walks through the endless expanse of their realm.

Villages appeared in the distance. Labourers in the fields greeted the passing soldier. The wide road between the fields slowly became alive with people. Tatars were driving to the city with milk-cans. Officers rode by on horseback, paying scant attention to the Siberian *chasseur* who saluted them smartly. Womenfolk, driving to the market, smiled at the blond, well-groomed soldier. "Probably an officer's orderly," they thought. The Czar stroked his short beard, secretly amused. He felt like Harun al-Raschid roaming the streets of Bagdad.

The hours flew by. From the minarets of Tataric mosques, the *muezzin's* plaintive call to prayer was heard. Nicholas scrutinized the faces of the passers-by. At last he saw his people stripped of all prescribed humility, people who did not acclaim him fervently. According to the revolutionaries, the whole of Russia resembled one great shambles. Now the Czar sought to ascertain the truth of these statements with his own eyes. The faces of the passers-by were calm and contented. Nobody was in tatters or appeared to be starving; indeed, many wore a satisfied smile. His soul overflowed with pride. He accepted the tranquil countenances of the people as proof of his successful reign. As for those revolutionaries, they were nothing but fools, utterly unable to fathom the real Russia! . . . But the Czar overlooked the fact that he was meandering through the most blessed province of his entire realm.

Nicholas continued his peregrination; mute and alone he wandered through the fields. He did not dare to address the peasants lest they immediately recognize him as a gentleman of St. Petersburg. His inflection was unmistakably that of a Guard officer from the northern capital.

It was late that afternoon when the Czar returned to Livadia Castle. Guards presented arms and officers rushed up to him in great excitement. General Dumbadse—his face distorted by worry—implored the Czar to receive him at once, privately. During that audience, the General recounted, in detail, the innumerable dangers which, according to him, were constantly threatening the Russian ruler. The Czar listened smilingly. "There is no need for me to hide from my subjects," he asserted with a touch of hauteur. "Besides, the Russian Czar is no coward."

"But, Your Majesty," the emboldened General cried, "this is not real courage!"

"And it appears to me that your dangers are not real either," the Czar retorted. "Precisely what constitutes courage in your eyes?"

General Dumbadse, a well-known anti-Semite, considered for a moment, then replied: "Well, if Your Majesty were to don a Jewish caftan and paste sidelocks on your temples and, in that garb, were to promenade in front of my house for fully five minutes . . . that would constitute courage."

The Czar laughed uproariously, his resentment forgotten.

The generals, however, could not forget the Czar's prank so easily. Such incidents must not be repeated! They pondered and pondered, eventually evolving a plan which could spring only from the brains of fear-crazed bureaucrats; in the offices of the Court Administration, it came to be known as the "Protection of the All-Highest Person." Under this system the Czar was hermetically isolated from the world. To insure his absolute safety, whole provinces were placed under martial law, and whole armies concentrated around the palaces. The entire country was veritably turned inside out whenever the train of the Emperor and Autocrat speeded along the seventy-two-hour stretch between Castle Livadia and Peterhof, or wherever the Czar sojourned in his realm. Each and every trip of the monarch became a grotesque and fantastic event.

Many days prior to an imperial journey, the entire route to be covered—even if comprising thousands of miles—was placed under martial law. Intersecting spur tracks were temporarily torn up to prevent "accidental collisions." Then, one day before the Czar's train was scheduled to pass through, the entire adjacent region was subjected to the so-called "third stage." From that moment, anybody approaching the tracks within one mile was shot without warning. The station platforms swarmed with secret service men and constables. Train schedules were suspended and thousands of soldiers stood guard along the entire route. During the night, the soldiers made camp-fires on either side of the railway embankment. The special train, speeding through a lane of stiffly erect soldiers and blazing fires, resembled a picture of the apocalypse. There was hardly a journey of the Czar that did not cost the lives of several people.

At home, in Peterhof, surrounded by the famous fountains of the old palace which once housed the beautiful Elizabeth and the great Catherine, the Czar dwelt under conditions akin to a prison existence. New plans and projects to safeguard the all-highest person were everlastingly proposed, experimented with, and discarded. The Czar spent day after day in an environment of fear-crazed officials, driven hysterical by ominous visions.

"Oh, when will it ever be possible for us to live quietly like decent people," sighed the Czarina. Nicholas remained silent. Through the open window of the old palace floated the melodious splashing of the fountains, interspersed with the measured footfalls of the guards.

The Czar spent the days at a desk in his study. The room was panelled in oak; on the wall were three portraits by Solomko: Peter the Great, Nicholas I, and Alexander III. From their frames, they looked down sternly upon their frail successor.

On the Czar's desk reposed a cigarette-case, the cover ornamented with the figure of a clown. Whenever Nicholas opened the case the clown raised his hands awkwardly and a music-box, hidden beneath the false bottom, tinkled the strains of the "Marseillaise." Supposedly issuing from the mouth of the clown, it was meant to ridicule the revolu-

tionary movement. This unique cigarette case was a present from the Dowager-Empress.

Sheaves of paper were heaped high upon the Czar's desk. Nicholas studied each document conscientiously. He accorded the same close attention to everything, whether important or trivial. At the same time, however, he was firmly convinced that all the wisdom behind these papers did not play much of a part in the fate of the realm. The weal of the country primarily depended on God's Providence.

Occasionally the Czar indulged in minor infractions of the law, delighting in breaking down the complicated net of ordinances and ukases through sheer strength of his imperial will. One day, among numerous other supplications, the monarch came across the telegraphed appeal of a Jewish watchmaker, named Isaac Goldenberg, from Preluk. It appeared that the son of the Jewish watchmaker—a student—was seriously ill in the capital city, but the police, in accordance with prevailing law, refused the distracted father permission to enter St. Petersburg. The Czar, remembering his own ailing son, wrote under the telegram: "Grant without delay. The man's place is at the bedside of his ailing son." Isaac Goldenberg's supplication, addressed to the Most Orthodox Czar himself, had required just twenty-four hours for a favourable decision.

Another time the Czar received an illiterate letter from a widowed peasant woman by the name of Vorobjova. In awkward, misspelt phrases she implored the Czar to release her son from military service. Although such exemption was contrary to law, Nicholas commanded: "Send her son home otherwise the entire farm may be ruined."

Impulsive decisions of this kind created havoc among the reactionary Court generals. Under no circumstances must the public hear of them! The Court Press Department regarded such intermezzi as definite departures from a Czar's inherent dignity. According to the Court Press Department, His Majesty should only send congratulatory telegrams to crack regiments of the Guard and to newly appointed generals.

His daily labours at an end, the Czar would rest in his chair, watching dusk fall over the park. He would light one of his famous long cigarettes with which the Sultan of Turkey presented him each year. His face devoid of expression, Nicholas speculated on the future of the Empire and of his dynasty. He knew that, within the borders of his realm, even within the very confines of his own Court—many an heir of a once mighty, ruling family was to be found. Before the Czar's eyes arose the fate of those sad remnants of a glory long since passed. There was, for example, the grand-nephew of the great Corsican, Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, who now commanded one of the Czar's Uhlan regiments. Then, there was that superannuated colonel living modestly in St. Petersburg, Prince Lusignan, descendant of Guido Lusignan, last of the kings of Cyprus and Jerusalem. In the Palace Chancellery, too, there worked a young man by the name of Paléologue, heir to the last Emperor of Byzantium. Prince Murat

served with the dragoons in Novgorod while Don Jaime de Bourbon, pretender to the Spanish crown, was with the Hussars at Grodno. One of the engineers in the Ministry of Transportation was a Count O'Rurk, descendant of the old kings of Ireland. Attached to the Ministry of Interior was a young general who caused the Czar a sharp pang whenever he beheld him. He bore the title and name of Prince Genghis Khan, being none other than an heir of the great conqueror. To be sure, the Czar never surmised that this same general was destined to become a high functionary of the *checka*.

In the gloaming, Nicholas meditated upon the fate of these and other royal descendants, now eking out a meagre existence, clinging to the fringes of the imperial purple. Would scions of Romanov, too, serve as vassals at some foreign Court one day? In the hand of God alone lay their fate.

Disturbed by phantoms of rebellion on every side, and isolated from the rest of the world by a cordon of police and military, Nicholas II succumbed to the old dream of the Romanovs: When the wisdom of mere mortals proved unavailing, God, the Almighty, would dispatch a messenger to show the ruler the way out of darkness!

The Czar wondered which of his generals, popes, ministers, or courtiers would be chosen as the tool of God. Or might the Czar himself, through perpetual prayer, hear the guiding voice of the Lord? Perchance—as once to the apostles—the messenger of the Almighty would appear to him as a poor man in simple garb?

The Czar smoked and pondered late into the night. Whenever he reached for another cigarette the clown intoned the "Marseillaise." In the distance the fountains splashed and, in an adjoining room, bent over her embroidery, the Czarina sighed: "Oh, when will it ever be possible for us to live quietly like decent people?"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### WHO SHALL PROTECT THE THRONE ?

IN his spacious study, in the palace at Czarskoje Selo, the Czar thumbed the endless reports of his ministers, governors, and ambassadors. Now and then his slim manicured fingers reached for a red crayon and, in a large, legible hand, made the notation : "That is exactly my opinion !" or "I shall never permit this !" Thus, in a few words, the careers and very lives of his subjects were settled, bringing happiness or despair to entire peoples.

Day after day, ministers called to submit painstakingly prepared memorials to the Czar or to render oral reports. Nicholas listened attentively, but a minister had no way of knowing whether his information really interested the monarch or just bored him. At mention of revolutionaries or terrorists—their desires and plans, their hopes and ideals—the Czar would frown and declare : "But these people fail to understand Russia. After all, powerful groups still support the crown ! Neither the nobility nor the cossacks, for example, ever would permit my dethronement. Why, to them, such a step would be equal to civil war !"

The ministers would nod their heads in full agreement. Naturally they shared His Majesty's opinion completely for they, too, feared the restless workers, the bestially savage *mushiks*, and the declassed burghers. The nobility, the officers' corps, and the Church could be implicitly relied upon as a bulwark for the throne. The ministers, courtiers, and generals were sincerely convinced that these elements would prove themselves an impenetrable wall protecting czarist power.

Late in the afternoon, after the Czar had read all the documents and listened to all the reports, he would frequently saunter through the quiet, immaculately kept lanes of Czarskoje Selo. The park, the palace, the pond with its black swans were all protected by crack regiments of his Guard.

From a wooden bridge the Czar would watch the placid pond and think of the officers' corps, of the nobility, of the cossacks, and of the popes—four pillars maintaining the tranquillity and stability of the Empire. That these four elements were imbued with utter fealty to the Czar was the profound, absolutely indestructible conviction of Nicholas II. To be sure, the workers were revolutionaries and so were the Jews, the Poles and, above all, the poor and starving *mushiks*. However, the officers' corps of the Guards, the aristocracy, the Church, and the cossacks were loyal to the very marrow of their bones.

The Czar's conviction was shared not only by his ministers and

courtiers, but virtually by everybody within the confines of his vast Empire. Even outside the country, on the terrace of a café overlooking Lake Geneva, Plechanov, venerable leader of the revolutionaries, spoke of the power of the nobles and the fealty of the Guard. "How can these walls around the Czar ever be undermined?" he asked rhetorically. And the same question was echoed by exiles in Siberia, by *émigrés* in Paris, by Jews in the Ukraine, and by all the ambassadors accredited to the Court of the Czar. They all looked upon Russia as a colossus, protected by a fourfold shield.

But there was one man who did not share this opinion. In his London lodging, Vladimir Lenin sat by the stove in a little kitchen. In anticipatory enjoyment he sniffed the aroma of frying bacon grease and watched while Krupskaja prepared pancakes. Time and again, Lenin repeated, as if it were a chant: "They will all be with us, the nobles, the cossacks, and even the Guard, provided we approach them in the right way!"

For centuries czardom had been closely entwined with the officers' corps. The officers were like a tribe, with the Czar as their chieftain. Every prerogative inside the borders of Russia was within the province of the aristocratic army officer, even the ultimate fate of the Czar's crown. No less than six times, in the history of the Empire, had army officers decided the succession to the throne. Finally, when Paul I had dared to resist the officers the bond between czar and officers' corps had been severed. In the night of the 1st of March, 1799, Prince Jashvil, an officer of the Guard, had thrown his sword on the table of a St. Petersburg palace and shouted: "You have to break eggs to make an omelet. The revolution is an omelet and the eggs are the heads of the czars!"

Two dozen officers of the Guard had received these words enthusiastically. It was the first time the word "revolution" had been pronounced within the borders of the realm by an officer of the Guard and had met the acclaim of his fellow officers.

The tie that united Czar and nobility apparently was as strong as granite. In the Russia of old the nobility constituted a people all by themselves, an entity altogether separate from the many other peoples of the realm. And it was from this chosen people—and not from the vague community of the whole of Russia—that the Czar descended. The czars pronounced what the nobility thought, and the nobility did what the Czar said. To all appearances, nothing in the world could break this bond.

Nevertheless, it had been broken on the 14th of December, 1825, when Nicholas I, in the Senate Square of his residential city of St. Petersburg, had ordered grapeshot to be fired at the aristocratic regiments of his realm. The grapeshot had struck the Russian nobility to the very core of their being. The cannon had been manned by men without names—commoners, mere watchdogs of the Czar. Two months later, five Decembrists had been hanged—bearers of the proudest names of the Empire, and many heirs of Rurik and Hedemin had been

sent into Siberian exile. From that moment onward Czar and nobility spoke different languages. However, God and the mounted host of cossacks could still be counted on to protect the holy realm.

God ! In the eyes of official Russia, He, too, was just a subject of His Majesty. In all manifestoes, in all-highest ukases, declarations, pronunciamientos, and orders, the Czar's name was printed in type twice as large as God's name. Whenever the Czar entered a church the Lord Almighty greeted him through the voice of his servants, metropolitans, archimandrites, and priests. The Czar was supreme protector of the Church and God's living representative on earth. It was the Czar who appointed saints, just as he appointed generals, and God simply had to accept the appointments. God's Church on earth rested in the hollow of the Czar's hand—a situation ultimately destined to prove fateful for the Church.

In the course of centuries the old Greek Orthodox Church, with its saints, icons, solemn ceremonies, and magic mysticism, had evolved into a czarist office. A man made a career for himself in the clergy just as he did in the ranks of the army. Bishops were given medals, titles, and salaries. In distant provinces it was the Christian host which extended the influence of the Christian Church.

In the same measure in which the power of the Czar over the Established Church grew, the power of the Church over the people declined. The more the Church fell under the spell of officialism, the more believers dissented. Sectarianism abounded. Presently, in the mystic fastnesses of Siberian forests, in the unending steppes of the Volga, in the ragged mountains of the Ural, new creeds established themselves. Eventually they became as dangerous to the magnificent edifice of the imperial Church as terrorists and revolutionaries proved to the formidable structure of the imperial realm.

Because the Established Church could no longer boast of saints and martyrs, it proceeded against the unofficial Churches with the bayonets and cannon of the imperial army. Before long, exiled and punished dissenters—*Raskolniki*—outnumbered exiled and punished terrorists. Although the Established Church loyally stood behind the Czar, nothing but a great, fear-inspiring abyss loomed behind the Established Church.

But even if God, the nobles, and the officers' corps should fail to rally around the throne, there still remained the mounted, savage cossacks, knout in hand, and loyalty to the Czar gleaming in their fierce eyes. The monarch looked upon these robust descendants of South Russian brigands, these richest, most spoiled and privileged peasants of his realm, as his chosen children. Before his ascent to the throne, Nicholas had been supreme hetman of all cossack regiments. Later, as Czar, his bodyguard still consisted of cossacks, and he preferred wearing the cossack uniform to all others. Not for a moment did Nicholas question the devotion of this warlike tribe.

Released from their chains, the cossacks—like wild dogs of the steppes—would ride rough-shod through the cities. When they swung

their knouts, labourers, peasants, and revolutionaries would take to their heels in all haste. It was the cossacks' songs of victory which were intoned atop destroyed barricades.

If once there had been a bond between Czar and nobility and it had been severed, there never had been any real bond between cossacks and Czar. Indeed, in the past, the cossacks had been the natural enemies of the Czar. Then, by granting them land, the Czar had bought their obedience if not their love. The cossacks remained professional warriors, mercenaries of the Czar, ready to serve just as long as it paid them to do so. Inherently, they were resentful of czardom because Russians had been appointed as leaders, thus depriving the cossacks of their old prerogative of choosing their own superiors. Moreover, it provoked the wild sons of the steppes when alien peasants were permitted to settle in the vicinity of their free villages.

Above all, the cossacks never could forget the proud roster of their liberty-loving hetmans who once had threatened Moscow. The czars had decapitated them, or quartered, drawn and burned them at the stake. Rasin, Mazepa, Bulavin—rebellious heretics and mutineers, against Czar and God—still were heroes in the eyes of the cossacks. Actually, nothing bound them to the brilliant city of St. Petersburg and the European Czar, except their pay, an enforced oath, and the privilege of galloping through revolutionary cities and whipping the despised burghers. . . .

The Czar, standing on the little bridge of Czarskoje Selo, contemplating the fate of his realm, was completely unaware that those whom he considered strong supporters of czardom were not quite as dependable as he assumed. Indeed, he never even surmised that he might be taking too much for granted. After all, his ears only heard the most submissive utterances of the nobility, the pious prayers of the Metropolitan and the frenzied cheering of regiment upon regiment of cossacks as they passed in brilliant parade before his palace.

Nobody in the whole of Russia—least of all the Czar and his revolutionary enemies—recognized the real power upon which the crown rested. It was rooted in more solid soil than nobility, army, Church, and cossacks. The unknown pillar of the Empire was the despised and feared primitive peasantry, far stronger and more numerous than all the other classes and peoples of Russia together.

The little villages of Central Russia, along the Volga, in far Siberia, and in the well nigh endless plains throughout the entire realm, were imbued with unswerving faith in the mystic powers of the Czar. This faith, inherent in every single *mushik*, was as indigenous and indestructible as the Russian soil itself. Generations of intellectual revolutionaries had essayed to explain to the peasantry the true nature of bloody czardom. The *mushiks* would listen patiently enough, and then just scratch their heads; all arguments of the intelligentsia rebounded ineffectively from the *mushiks'* innate instincts.

The *mushik* was convinced that Little Father Czar not only was the terrestrial ruler of the realm but a magician to boot. In the holy

ceremony of anointment, he had been endowed with the gift to perform miracles. Year after year, on the 6th of January, the Czar would solemnly bless the water of the Neva, thus blessing the people who drank of this water. Only once, in 1904, an attempted assassination disturbed the ceremony. The following year the Czar stayed away, refusing to bless the river and the people. Immediately in St. Petersburg and along the entire course of the Neva, epidemics of typhoid, dysentery, and cholera developed. Many people died, and the peasants, full of fear, pointed out to each other that the Little Father of the realm was angry with his people. The epidemic lasted throughout the year. At last, on the next 6th of January, the clergy succeeded in inducing the Czar to bless the waters of the Neva once again. From that very day the epidemic abated and soon came to an end altogether. The simple peasants along the Neva were filled with thanksgiving and admiration for their miracle-working Czar.

Even as late as the eve of the great revolution the exiled revolutionary Sensinov, in a God-forsaken Siberian village, vainly sought to enlighten a crowd of peasants on the Czar.

"Do you know that we went to war with Japan?" Sensinov asked.

"Certainly, we know," the *mushiks* retorted, snugly stroking their beards.

"And do you know how this war ended?" Sensinov asked next.

"Why, of course, we Russians won the war," came their answer.

"But we lost the war. We had to give up half of Saghalin to the Japanese."

"We won the war just the same," the peasants repeated stubbornly.

"But Saghalin, Saghalin! We gave up half of it to the Japanese!" Sensinov shouted.

"If the Czar," the peasants maintained, "deigned to give half of this 'Saccharin' to the Japanese, he did it of his own free will. We won the war just the same."

"And what do you think of the Czar in general?" Sensinov inquired, scarcely containing himself.

The *mushiks* looked at one another and replied doubtfully: "Well, what should we think of him? He still is so young."

"Young? He is reigning for fifteen years now, and he is forty."

"That's just it. He is still young, and everything is so new to him. What should one say about him?"

Although both intellectuals and peasants spoke Russian, their respective languages were utterly different. Fifteen years meant an eternity to Sensinov; the *mushiks*, however, still vividly recalling those dreaded days of the cruel Ivan, the dark Vassili, and the quiet Alexius, could only gaze in embarrassment at this stranger who asked them to pass judgment on their Czar, Nicholas II. After a thousand-year history of the realm, he had reigned so far merely an infinitesimal span of fifteen years.

Czar and peasantry, as far as the masses of Russia were concerned, formed a magic entity which would prove indestructible as long as the

Russian soil itself lasted. Frequently the *mushiks* did not even know the name of the reigning Czar. But that did not matter ; important alone was their consciousness of living in that clearly defined space, Holy Russia, which in the eyes of the *mushiks* was comparable to the lap of the Holy Mother of God. This space was crowned with a cupola, and that cupola was the Czar. An all-pervading feeling of safety beneath this cupola accounted for the people's loyalty to their Czar. Under the protection of this cupola the *mushik* was only too ready to slay the nobles and plunder the rich. The cupola itself, however, must never be touched ! As long as that stood, robbery and slaughter were forgiven. Everything the *mushik* did—rebellion included—was in the name of the Czar, who appeared as omnipotent, as omnipresent, and as unfathomable as Nature itself. The howling winds, the rushing rivers, the snows of the winters, and the eternal miracle of fertility were accepted by the *mushik* as evidences of the wondrous powers of Little Father Czar, dispenser of all grace, and God's own representative on earth.

That evil might emanate from Little Father Czar was unthinkable. True, the earth reeked of evil, but the nobles, the boyars, and the officials were alone responsible. The *mushiks* were still imbued with the traditions of old Byzantine myths, according to which Czar and people fought a common battle against the evils which stood between them, seeking to separate them. When Alexander II abolished serfdom but left the estates to the gentry, every Russian peasant was convinced that the nobles and landowners had intercepted the Czar's order for free land.

In the memory of the people the legend of the good Czar, fettered by evil demons, retained all its realism. Now and then there were rumours that these demons were prepared to exchange the Czar for a heretic with claws and horns, and to set the impostor on the throne. Thereupon, the aroused *mushiks*, armed with scythes, pitchforks, and sickles rushed to the Czar's assistance in all haste. On every side castles of the nobles were destroyed by flames ; wine cellars were plundered ; and the wealthy were ruthlessly slain. When a punitive expedition finally was sent against the rioting peasantry, they firmly believed that it was not at the command of Little Father Czar, but that evil demons were rampant in the land.

The Czar's power over these simple souls was limitless. In 1834, when cholera had ravaged Moscow and many adjacent villages, the Government had sent physicians into the stricken areas. As most of these medical men had been nobles or foreigners, the rumour soon spread among the peasantry that they had come to poison the people. Presently, amid a dying city, scourged by cholera, wild rebellion had blazed everywhere. Physicians on their errand of mercy had been brutally butchered and the police driven off ; only with the greatest difficulty had the Guards eventually succeeded in protecting the Kremlin.

At that juncture the scion on the throne of the Romanovs had been

Nicholas I Pavlovitch. The rebellion notwithstanding, the Czar had decided to drive in his coach through the raving city, unarmed. When the mob had beheld the ornate carriage, the liveried coachman, and an officer in uniform, the cry had rung out: "Another of those poisoners!"

Amidst the howling, booing whistling crowd that surrounded the imperial *calèche* in Red Square, Nicholas I Pavlovitch had alighted from the coach. The multitude had gazed upon his gigantic figure and had withered under his imperious gaze. They had stared at the double-headed eagle, crowning his officer's helmet, and presently they had recognized the Czar. There had been a momentary lull, and then the threatening voice of Nicholas had thundered: "Down on your knees! Within the borders of My realm people may be poisoned only upon My special order!" Shaking his finger, like a strict father to a disobedient son, he had added: "Take off your hats and cross yourselves!"

Without a murmur the people had sunk to their knees. The Czar, too, had crossed himself and had pronounced: "From now on the cholera will abate!"

Indeed, the scourge soon passed.

Nicholas I Pavlovitch had been an accomplished initiate of that mystic bond twixt Czar and people. Even Alexander III had been sensitive to it. In Nicholas II, however, the knowledge of this holy secret of the realm was, to a great extent, buried too deeply in his unconscious mind. Only in very rare moments did he feel the spell of the century-old tie binding Czar and people to each other. It was the misfortune of Nicholas II that he groped for the support of his people. Alas, a czar must not grope; he must know! . . .

On the little bridge that spanned the pond at Czarskoje Selo the Last of the Czars reflected soberly and objectively on the fate of the crown. And it was precisely there he erred since the power of a czar rests neither upon intellectual cogitations nor economic calculations; rather, it springs from emotion exclusively. No minister, no revolutionary, no high general could recognize as much, but the Czar had to be aware of it!

In endless speeches and reports the Czar was everlastingly assured that the nobility, the officers' corps, and the Church constituted the pillars of the throne. How could he doubt it? As if under a somnambulistic spell, hedged in by phantoms, he faltered towards a yawning abyss. His road of ruin was crowded with cheering officers, whip-cracking cossacks, proud nobles, and dignified popes. Nobody knew, nobody even surmised, that within the borders of the vast realm of Nicholas II only monarch and peasantry agreed on the necessity of czarism.

When infallible, holy czarism actually began to stumble and totter, a warning arose from the ranks of the people. They dully sensed the imminent danger threatening their Czar. Mystic, unfathomable Russia, between 1904 and 1917, knocked at the doors of the Czar's

palace with all its might. The obsessed Mitja Koljaba and the much-talked-of Darja Ossipova, along with many other imbeciles and miracle men, were but the expression of the people's deeply felt apprehensions for their Czar.

The last warning which the people sent to their Czar was in the person of Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### CZAR ALEXIUS'S JURDOVI

**I**N the Czarina's boudoir in Peterhof as well as in Czarskoje Selo there hung, beside many other pictures of relatives, a painting of the second of the Romanovs, Czar Alexius Michailovitch, "The Very Quiet." The Czar's suite, both in Livadia and in Anichkov Palace, contained many antiques from the time of the "Very Quiet" Alexius.

During the first years of Nicholas II's rule, picturesque festivities occasionally were held in the magnificent ballrooms of the Winter Palace, the guests appearing in historical costumes from the time of Alexius Michailovitch. As if by magic, the White Hall, the Armorial Room, and the Malachite Hall were transformed into the hallowed rooms of the Kremlin of the old czars. Boyars, voivodes, and jesters, women with heavy head-dresses, strelitzes, and popes would revive, for a single night, the ancient ceremony and pomp of the Kremlin Court.

Surrounded by his proud boyars, quiet Nicholas II greatly resembled his ancestor, quiet Alexius. Nicholas donned the heavy, golden ceremonial robe of his famous forebears only rarely. Usually he appeared in the ballroom garbed in a red velvet coat, a small fur cap, and wearing a little golden dagger. On the chest of his coat gleamed the czarist crown, embroidered in golden thread, atop a large Byzantine eagle. The embroidered old imperial eagle on the chest of the youthful Czar symbolized the past merging into the present with fitting dignity. The Czarina, wearing a high cap on her artfully arranged coiffure, heavy strings of pearls around her throat, and clad in a coat embroidered with precious stones, recalled the aloof rigidity of Byzantine icons.

Czar and Czarina liked nothing better than to revert to the times of Alexius Michailovitch. In many ways their own lives appeared to them a strange counterpart of that of the old czar. He, too, had ascended the throne an inexperienced youth, and a clique of self-seeking boyars had sought to separate him from his people. Like Alexius, Nicholas II had to dismiss one after another of his father's old servants. Only then it became possible for the young Czar to discern clearly the true face of his realm, hitherto hidden behind the false assurances of his courtiers.

The empire of quiet Alexius had been convulsed with bloody, never-ending battles, and protracted revolts. The monarch's most formidable antagonist on the banks of the Volga had been the vicious rebel Stenika Rasin. His firebrands had destroyed many a noble's estate on the banks of the mighty river, just as, in 1905, the intelligentsia had wrought havoc with their revolutionary ideas.

Like Alexius, Czar Nicholas II had succeeded in suppressing the rebellion, enforcing the obedience of the boyars, and restoring order. Nicholas never credited these achievements to his able governors but was convinced that it had been God's miraculous Providence that had saved his realm. In all probability the same prayers which had brought victory to the second of the Romanovs would also prove efficacious for the thirteenth ruler of that house.

The strange parallel between the second and the thirteenth of the Romanovs was evident in the private, as well as the political, life of the two czars. Nicholas also enjoyed listening to the chimes of old bells; he was enchanted, too, with patriarchal family life, and similarly possessed that imperturbable spiritual calm which earned for Alexius the sobriquet of "The Very Quiet."

Both czars were tried by personal misfortunes that were nearly identical. It had been Alexius's dream to give the realm a healthy and strong heir. Providence, however, had chosen to send him one daughter after another. Whenever Nicholas II regarded his four blooming, healthy daughters he was reminded of the daughters of Alexius. And was not the strong will and extraordinary talents of his oldest daughter, Olga, comparable to the imperious and gifted Princess Sophia who, for many years after the death of her father, had steered the ship of state through dangerous shoals and devastating storms with a firm hand? And finally, when Almighty God had answered the prayers of the pious Czar Alexius, and Czarina Maria Iljinishna bore him male children, the sons had been sickly and destined for an early grave. Like the patient sufferer Job, Alexius had bowed to his misfortune and presently the Lord had rewarded him: The last son Heaven granted Alexius was Peter the Great, first emperor on the throne of the czars.

In comparing his life with that of Czar Alexius, Nicholas was confident that his life, too, would find a happy culmination and that he would bequeath a great ruler to Russia. The road to happiness which Alexius had travelled was clearly outlined, and since Nicholas resembled his forebear so greatly it was naturally enough that he should follow in the footsteps of quiet Alexius.

Amidst Court intrigues, revolts, and catastrophes of all kinds, the "very quiet" czar had led the patriarchal life of a peaceful landowner. Pious by nature Alexius had spent many years in sacred meditation. His supplications for a healthy heir had brought him into close contact with the primitive faith of his people. He had felt certain that a sturdy heir would be granted him in answer to the fervent prayers of a God-fearing people.

Holy men, miracle workers, and Fools in Christ had crowded the dark corridors of the Kremlin. Along with the countrymen of his day, Alexius had believed that the cripples, imbeciles, deaf and dumb, the idiots and the obsessed were marked by God and, for this reason, were in especially close contact with Heavenly Powers. According to the pious conception of Alexius, State and Church formed an entity,

and Fools in Christ—receiving their inspiration directly from God—were as important, at least, as the robust voivodes who led the Czar's armies to conquest. Alexis had passed many hours of each day in the society of the afflicted and the pious. His quiet soul had derived as much elation from a conversation with some mendicant friar, returning from Jerusalem, as from the report describing, in gruesome detail, the execution of that fierce rebel-leader, Stenika Rasin.

Nicholas II, too, was pious. Why, then, should he not also enjoy the same heavenly blessings which had been granted to Alexis? The admiration of the thirteenth of the Romanovs for the second of his line, at first harmless enough, eventually lured him to follow the mental and spiritual example of the quiet Alexis to the fullest measure.

Although great changes had occurred since the rule of Czar Alexis, the soul of the Russian people had remained unchanged. Just as in the days of yore so-called *jurodovi*—lunatics and cripples—still wandered through the endlessness of the Russian steppes, still partaking of celestial blessings in mystic and ecstatic rites.

To be sure, since the days of Peter the Great, these afflicted ones had been denied access to the imperial palace, because there no longer were any czars, only European imperators! The people, however, still believed fervently in the blessings of the *jurodovi*. How could the Czar ever penetrate to the core of his peoples' innermost being if the walls of the palace separated him from those Fools in Christ who enjoyed the faith and veneration of his subjects?

Early in his reign the historical balls in the Winter Palace imbued the Czar with the desire to surround himself with the *jurodovi* of Czar Alexis. The mystically inclined soul of the Czarina embraced the idea joyfully. She strongly believed in the divine spirit of the Russian people. Moreover, since the clergy would reintroduce the *jurodovi* at Court, after three hundred years of proscription, a guarantee was furnished that these Fools in Christ would not conspire with the Evil One. The longing of the imperial couple—first restrained by a feeling of disdain—to establish contact with those holy, primitive powers of the people, grew in the same degree that misfortunes descended upon the ruling house and the Empire.

The Court clergy, the fathers-confessor of Their Majesties, the bishops, and the popes did everything in their power to further contact of the Most Orthodox Czar with the *jurodovi*. Through the instrumentality of the clergy, the imperial palace—exactly as in the times of the second Romanov—gradually became crowded with imbeciles, miracle men, and pious pilgrims who, according to the ancient faith of the people, proclaimed the wishes of God in inarticulate, disconnected gibberish. The new-comers presently crowded out the Western spiritism which had been *en vogue* at Court for some time, and which the high clergy had resented, regarding European technique of spirit contact as un-Russian and un-Christian. The clergy believed that, since the Orthodox Czar held sway over all the powers of native magic, by virtue of holy anointment, he should abstain from employing the tricks

of Western schismatic thaumaturgi and mystagogues. The Czarina, too, having experienced the wondrous powers of Holy Seraphim, was increasingly in favour of native miracle men. In a letter written at about that time, Alexandra Feodorovna expressed herself strongly against Western spiritism, denouncing it as "satanical and destructive."

One of the first in the long row of intercessors between the Czar and God was Mitja Koljaba, who was poor in spirit. He came from the neighbourhood of the famous Dostoevskian monastery, Optina Pustynj. A historian of that time describes Mitja Koljaba as follows: "He was bow-legged, misshapen, almost mute, with two stumps for arms. He had to be led, as his eyesight was very poor; his hearing, too, was deficient, and his speech consisted of a few horrible sounds, uttered in painful gasps. Whenever he was shaken by an epileptic attack and began to shriek, his voice changed from an uncanny whimper into the sinister howling of an animal. Finally, it would become an unnerving and fear-inspiring roaring and baying. The repulsive impressions thus created were intensified by insane flailing of his deformed arms. Indeed, one had to have extremely strong nerves to endure the presence of this imbecile."

Moving among the *jurodovi* imposed a great strain on the Czarina. When, bending over the twitching body of Mitja, she tried to interpret his inarticulate whimpering, her eyes filled with compassionate tears. She strongly believed that this *jurodovi*, in all his repulsive wretchedness, stood definitely nearer to the throne of the Almighty than many a courtier or minister.

The Czarina searched through old theological writings of the Greek Orthodox Church for some mention of mediators between czar and God. To this end she studied the dead Slavonic language of the Church, and the deeper she penetrated into orthodox mysticism the more it appeared to her that only someone springing from the deepest roots of the people would be entrusted with the exalted task of a mediator.

Simultaneously with the imbecile Mitja Koljaba, a demented woman by the name of Darja Ossipova was introduced at Court. In her epileptic attacks she uttered prophecies, mysterious formulæ, and terrible curses. She, in turn, was followed by a half-witted peasant from Kasan who, in mystic ecstasy, would spit a sacramental wafer from his mouth into that of some courtier.

Like augurs of old, Czar and Czarina closely observed all the twitching, screaming, and howling *jurodovi* whom the high clergy brought to the palace. In the babbling and whining of these pitiful creatures they seriously endeavoured to discover a hidden meaning. In a steady stream, barefooted friars, pilgrims, and cripples were brought to the Court by the popes. While Nicholas II, in the presence of the *jurodovi*, always maintained the bearing of a ruler by the Grace of God, the soul of the poor Czarina presently fell completely under the spell of a mystical and direct contact with God. To the Emperor and Autocrat of All

the Russias, the *jurodovi* represented but one of the many aspects of his realm ; although they might enjoy the Grace of God, and although their advice was very interesting at times, for the anointed wearer of the purple, they were merely ghostly menials, occasionally permitted to place their insanity and wretchedness in the service of their Most Orthodox Czar. Whenever it seemed necessary to the Czar he did not hesitate to exile these *jurodovi* or imprison them like revolutionaries or other detrimental elements. Heir to an ancient ruling house, Nicholas II found it impossible to surrender completely to the motley host invading his palace.

The Czarina was utterly different. A German princess of little importance suddenly raised to the dizzying heights of Russian omnipotence, she groped for support. The exalted isolation of porphyrogenites—for the Czar self-evident enough because it was inherited—proved too much for her. Unable to find a living being equal to herself in the whole Russian world, she clutched anxiously and hopefully at those whom she assumed to be in direct contact with the Orthodox god of her realm. The same experience which, to the Czar, retained some aspects of a jest, became, for the Czarina, a solemn quest, imbued with utmost importance. As one enlightened by an inner understanding, she moved through the crowd of barefooted monks, revolting cripples and obsessed imbeciles. Before long association with the *jurodovi* became second nature to her.

Thus was ushered in the strangest chapter in contemporary history, the story of a peasant—Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin—to whom a czarina accorded honours befitting a divinity. Rasputin had been known to the imperial couple for fully ten years without, however, playing a prominent part among the host of divine intercessors. As early as 1900, the Czar had noted in his diary : " To-day we made the acquaintance of Grigori, a man from Tobolsk, whom God loves."

But not until 1911 did the name of this man flash, meteor-like, across the firmament of the Czar's realm.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### THE CONFIDANTE

THEIR Imperial Russian Majesties were depressed by the petrified pomp of their grandiose Court. Everything that surrounded them--their entourage and servants, the very furniture--seemed to lead a secret, independent life.

The loneliness pervading the great halls weighed on the Czarina particularly. While her imperial husband attended to state business, and while her children were entrusted to their various tutors, Alexandra Feodorovna suffered agonizing hours of loneliness.

The Empress spent entire days in her lavender boudoir, her soul steeped in gloomy foreboding. "Her room," writes Madame Vyrubova, "always was filled with a superabundance of beautiful flowers, especially lilac and roses. On a low table next to the Empress's chaise-longue stood a great many family photographs, amid letters and telegrams which the Empress--if they did not come from her relatives--frequently forgot to answer. Over the chaise-longue hung a large painting: 'The Dream of the Madonna,' depicting the Holy Virgin asleep against a marble column, surrounded by lilies and angels. . . . The stillness of the boudoir only now and then was shattered by chords struck on a grand piano in the room above. There the grandduchesses, one after another, would practise the same melody."

Apparently there was no escape from the oppressive, almost mystical, silence dominating the lavender boudoir into a free and distant world. Since the Empress could concern herself with politics merely unofficially, the one field of endeavour left to her was the education of her children; there, fortunately, no restraint was imposed on her. And so the ambitious Czarina dedicated all her pent-up energy to her four daughters and her ailing son.

Many hours were spent in the children's rooms where the Czarina discussed the respective curricula in great detail with the tutors, Mr. Gilliard, Mr. Gibbs, and Frau Schneider. The Empress personally instructed her daughters in domestic affairs, teaching them to sew and knit. With her own hands she dressed the young grandduchesses' dolls, kept by them in a closet which bore the warning: "Admittance only by permission of Tatiana or Olga."

Luxuries were studiously withheld from the imperial children. Until they became of age they never wore jewellery. Association with children of the aristocracy was greatly restricted by the Czarina, because she feared her children would be exposed to undesirable influences. As a result, according to Elizabeth Naryshkina-Kurakina, Chief

Lady-in-Waiting of the Empress, "the grandduchesses behaved like little savages when moving in society."

The Empress, preceding the birth of her son, had taken the greatest interest in the rearing of her children; after the Czarevitch began to ail this became the main task of her life. The illness of the heir to the throne was kept secret for the longest time, so that, to outsiders, the anxious solicitude of the Czarina for her son seemed exaggerated to the point of ridicule. Courtiers voiced the opinion that an Empress should not neglect her duties as mother of her country in order to spend her days and nights in the nursery of her son.

The increasing domesticity of the Czarina was observed by the courtiers with rising criticism. Alexandra Feodorovna had hoped that the chasm separating her from the Court would be bridged once she had borne the Czar a son. Now, however, she perceived that the birth of the Czarevitch had served only to emphasize the estrangement. If the courtiers had manifested an air of aloofness in the past, now the first signs of malice became clearly discernible. With satisfied smirks, the Court clique circulated a statement, allegedly made by the Grandduke of Hesse-Darmstadt, the Czarina's brother: "The Czar is an angel, but he does not know how to manage my sister. She needs somebody with a strong will to rule and restrain her from time to time."

Aware that the Emperor did not in all likelihood exert this will over the Czarina, the critical courtiers strained every effort to detect who, within their circle, actually influenced the Empress. Presently, this person was discovered to be the former lady-in-waiting of the Empress, Madame Anna Tanejeva Vyubova. The jealous Court clique promptly turned against her. This somewhat obese lady, whose life was so strangely tied up with that of the imperial couple, was a descendant of an old Court family. An excitable and simple-minded soul, Madame Vyubova made a plain enough appearance, her outstanding characteristic being a flawless complexion. Her extravagant admiration for the Empress was almost morbid, and at times akin to fanatic superstition. Indeed, Madame Vyubova veritably drenched the Czarina in a wealth of ecstatic adoration.

Although Madame Vyubova's worship made the Empress uneasy at first, subsequently she felt compassion and attachment for this simple creature who, according to Count Witte's description, "regarded the Czarina rapturously, everlastingly sighing: 'Oh, oh!'"

Madame Vyubova and the Empress spent many musical hours together; too, the obese lady would squat at the Czarina's feet, gobbling up the religious tracts which the Empress gave her. Used to the cool indifference of her entourage, Alexandra Feodorovna became deeply touched by Madame Vyubova's idolatry. On her first boat trip with her the Empress said: "Thank God, at last I have found a genuine friend."

Presently, Madame Vyubova became the Czarina's steady travelling companion. Her frugality and modesty combined to create a profound impression on the Czarina. "There never has been an imperial

favourite," writes Paléologue, "who was more modest and less presentable."

Madame Vyubova lived in a simply furnished little house in the neighbourhood of Czarskoje Selo Palace. There she often was visited by the imperial couple, the Empress bringing little cakes and the Emperor a bottle of sherry. These little gifts represented the only material support the nearly destitute Madame Vyubova received from her imperial friends apart from her monthly salary of 270 roubles.

Common prayers, religious discussions, and music furnished the spiritual foundation for the friendship of the two women. Although the Empress had displayed religious fervour in the past, Madame Vyubova's proximity aggravated this tendency to such a degree that eventually Alexandra Feodorovna's health began to suffer from it.

The nervous ailment of the Empress grew steadily worse. "Madame Vyubova," writes Madame Naryshkina-Kurakina, "never left the Czarina alone. She was always in her suite, mooning over her, kissing her hands, and claiming that she alone regarded the Czarina's condition with sufficient seriousness and could fully appreciate the Empress's sufferings. Doctor Fischer, the attending physician, wisely concluded that the patient merely had a light form of *la grippe*, and that her real sufferings could be traced to a nervous system, weakened by over-indulgence in mystical exultation. Doctor Fischer finally resolved to visit Madame Vyubova and, appealing to her adoration for the Czarina, try to induce her to leave the Empress to herself for some time. By bringing the ailing Czarina into an entirely different spiritual and physical environment, he hoped to effect a cure. However, Madame Vyubova merely laughed when the physician sought to enlist her help; whereupon Doctor Fischer, recognizing that he could not expect any support from that source, asked to be dismissed from the case."

The jealous, relentless friendship of Madame Vyubova weighed upon the Czarina like a nightmare. She felt as if a strong, albeit invisible iron band was encircling her very soul. Nevertheless, the more fanatic Madame Vyubova's friendship became, the more supinely the Empress gave herself over to its torturous enjoyment. Only in her later letters to the Czar does she complain of the importunity of this woman. "She is spoiled and badly bred. . . . Many people visit her so that she really has no reason to complain of loneliness. . . . She was in an exceedingly ill-humour this morning and not in the least amiable. In fact, one could almost say she was rude. . . . It may not seem nice of me to talk about her in this way, but, you know, sometimes she is very hard to bear."

However, the more the dissatisfaction of her entourage became evident to the Czarina, the more desperately she clung to Madame Vyubova's friendship. Even Madame Vyubova's secret infatuation for the Czar, which threw the Empress into paroxysms of jealousy at times, proved unable to loosen the strange bond between the two friends.

Accompanied by Madame Vyrubova, the Empress frequently embraced the quiet solitude of the sea. Life aboard the imperial yacht was not unlike that of a self-sufficient *bourgeois* family. On these voyages the Emperor would receive reports from his ministers only twice a week ; the rest of his time he gave to his family. The peaceful harmony of those days was complete.

But while the Empress continued in her odd friendship, while the children played and the Emperor enjoyed long walks on deserted islands, Court circles in St. Petersburg indulged in acrimonious criticism of the Czarina.

The cold aversion which the Empress expressed to the official world, in contrast to her warm affection for Madame Vyrubova, appeared as a challenge. The whole Court and all strata of society—indeed, the entire capital city—just seemed to be waiting for a chance to discharge the full measure of their keen anger against the Empress.

"One should know one's calling," Grandduchess Maria Pavlovna once said to the Empress, seeking to warn her. But Alexandra Feodorovna never understood the warning. She never mastered the technique of imperial life—"the calling of an Empress." Her entire life was rendered tragic by her complete inability to grasp and master the sensitive mechanism that inevitably attaches itself to crowned heads.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### THE STARETZ

**A**MAZEMENT, verging on perturbation, pervaded the corridors of the imperial palace, invading the dark halls and marble niches of the impressive ceremonial rooms. Generals on duty, chamberlains, and masters of ceremony exchanged terrified glances with one another. The courtiers whispered among themselves that, at night, a *mushik* with a shaggy beard and the rough coat of a peasant would sneak up to the Czar's suite to bless the Emperor and perform strange exorcisms over the body of the ailing Czarevitch. It was reported that the mysterious *mushik* addressed the Czarina as "Mama," and he was also said to be in the habit of caressing the imperial daughters. To be sure, neither the Palace Commandant, nor his many aides-de-camp, had ever come face to face with this peasant. In fact the Palace Commandant professed unbounded surprise when Mademoiselle Tjutshev, governess to the Czar's daughters, informed him of the *mushik's* nocturnal visit. He knew very well that, officially, he was not to take any notice of this *mushik*, who called himself Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin.

A cordon of palace police, sleuths, guards and others watched each and every step of the imperial couple. Every trip, visit, or conversation of the Czar was overheard and jotted down. During politically unstable times the *okhrana* even listened in on the monarch's telephone conversations. If, despite all this, the Czar had a peasant brought to his study in the dead of night, through a side door and up a dark, narrow, winding staircase, this secrecy, in the eyes of the police, was equivalent to an all-highest order to ignore the existence of the *mushik* completely. Only gradually did the curious courtiers and police succeed in ascertaining by what circuitous route this uncouth peasant reached the suite of the Russian Czar.

Some years previously the Siberian pilgrim, Rasputin, had been noticed among the crowd of holy men, Fools in Christ and magic healers, who, supported by the Court clergy, incessantly knocked at the doors of the imperial palace. Archimandrite Theophan, director of the priests' seminary, and one of the most learned theologists in Russia, had first observed, in the halls of that institution, the intelligent and pious wanderer from far distant Siberia. Religious conversations with Rasputin had convinced Father Theophan that this peasant was a true representative of that primitive, living and unrestrained religiosity in the hearts of the people for which Their Majesties yearned.

Sponsored by the Archimandrite, Rasputin was introduced to the high clergy, and that body proceeded to probe the soul of this "saint

of the people." Rasputin made a most favourable impression ; especially the influential Court cleric, Bishop Hermogen, seemed to enjoy the naïve wisdom of this peasant hugely. Rasputin was also accepted by the priest Illiodor, who for many years had been one of the most important pillars of reactionary orthodoxy. Even the celebrated God-fearing Father John of Kronstadt praised this man who seemed so pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. He did not hesitate to receive his blessing publicly in proper and pious humility. Thus protected by the good will of the clergy, Rasputin embarked upon the road leading to the palace of God's Anointed One.

Introduced by Illiodor into the circle of the conservative "Union of Genuine Russian People," Rasputin succeeded in creating an excellent impression there also. The conservative gentlemen listened sympathetically to this peasant who crudely explained that Duma and constitution were works of the Evil One, and that now, as always, the heart of the Russian people still beat with unflagging loyalty for Little Father Czar. And while the "Union of Genuine Russian People" perceived merely the echo of the unadulterated soul of the Russian people in Rasputin's voice, it was Grandduchess Anastasia, the Montenegrin Princess, who sensed Rasputin's supernatural powers and fell under his spell as soon as he had been introduced to her.

The furrowed face of Rasputin, his piercing eyes, the unquestionable magnetism he exerted, created an overwhelming impression on the mystically inclined Grandduchess. To her, the eyes of the Staretz—a miracle-performing, wandering monk—resembled a well-spring of supermundane life in which she might immerse her weary soul. Burning with eagerness, the Montenegrin Princess speedily discovered that the Staretz indeed possessed supernatural gifts. The wise words of Rasputin had the ring of prophecies and on many an occasion the peasant actually succeeded in reading the most intimate thoughts of the Grandduchess and her entourage. Even more remarkable, this peasant was possessed of healing powers. By merely speaking softly or resorting to his hypnotic glance, he could heal apparently incurable invalids, especially women.

Nothing was more natural than the desire to test the healing powers of this new protégé at the bedside of the ailing Czarevitch. Long since, the Czarina had lost all confidence in the ability of the Court physicians and was only too willing to listen to the Grandduchess's suggestion. To Alexandra Feodorovna's mind there was no reason why, in science as in politics, magic powers, inherent in the people, should not prove much more efficacious than all the pitiful experiments of experts. The Czar, too, offered no objection to the Grandduchess's proposal, inasmuch as the pious Staretz had been introduced to him by the leaders of Russian orthodoxy and the only truly loyal party of his realm, the "Union of Genuine Russian People."

Even the first meeting of the imperial couple with the Staretz differed substantially from the many meetings of the Czarina with the ordinary crowd of *jurodovi*. While the latter usually consisted of

babbling soothsayers and pious advisers, Rasputin displayed neither marked humility nor forbidding sternness.

The man who appeared before the imperial couple seemed to be just an ordinary Siberian *mushik*. He was quiet, stood erect, and had an open, forceful face. Ignoring all prescribed etiquette, Rasputin embraced Czar and Czarina, kissing each three times in accordance with an old Siberian custom. Moreover, Rasputin did not produce any mysterious magic for the Czar's benefit. In a convincing, straightforward manner he simply told him of his native Siberian village, Pokrovskoje, of his pilgrimages to old monasteries, of the joys and struggles of the peasants, and of the people's love for Little Father Czar.

No sooner had the Czarina hesitatingly led the peasant into the Czarevitch's room than the child took to him with unexpected enthusiasm. The boy listened with absorption to the tales Rasputin told, forgetting his pain, and again and again demanding that the Staretz be brought to his bedside. Rasputin's simple, direct manner won the Czar's approval, while the Czarina became firmly convinced that this uncouth peasant was the friend whose appearance had been predicted by M. Philippe. But not until a remarkable incident had occurred was Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin able to grasp the soul of the Czarina in his strong peasant hands.

Every autumn the imperial family would journey to Spala in Belovesh Wood for the hunting season. Thus, in 1911, Czar and Czarina, accompanied by the children, repaired to the small wooden hunting lodge, built on the edge of a primeval forest. One day the Czarevitch played beside a pond. In attempting to jump into a boat he made a spontaneous, violent movement. His face disfigured by pain, the boy fell to the ground. Those blue blotches appeared on his body which, in a bleeder, always indicate dangerous hæmorrhages. The Czarevitch was rushed to the hunting lodge. A special train from St. Petersburg brought to Spala the imperial private physicians, Professors Botkin, Feodorov, and Rauchfuss. After a minute examination, the three physicians agreed that the condition of the heir to the throne was hopeless.

The Court Ministry made ready to acquaint the nation with the sad news. Prayers for the Czarevitch were offered in all the churches throughout the country. Ministers and courtiers awaited word of the Czarevitch's passing, momentarily. It was then that the desperate Czarina saw her last hope in that mediator whom Heaven recently had sent her. A short telegram ordered Staretz Rasputin to Spala.

In this connection, General Mossolov, who was present in the hunting lodge during the Czarevitch's illness, says: "One evening, Professor Feodorov stayed with me after his two colleagues had departed. He told me: 'I don't agree with my colleagues. I am of the opinion that something more drastic should be done. Of course, strenuous measures are never devoid of danger. However, if I alone were treating the Czarevitch, I would apply them just the same. What do you

think, General? Shall I consult the Emperor, or shall I resort to the remedy I have in mind without his knowledge?' I replied that I was in no position to offer advice. Then, as soon as the Professor had left, I informed the Court Minister of the conversation. While both of us stood together a courier passed and told us that he had just received Her Majesty's order to have a motor-car at the station, the following morning, for Rasputin.

"Upon his arrival next day, the Staretz was taken directly to the Czarevitch's bedside. At two o'clock that afternoon the physicians reported to me, in great excitement, that the hæmorrhages had stopped. As they were leaving I requested Professor Feodorov to remain behind for a moment. I asked him whether he had applied his remedy. He waved his hand and said: 'Even if I had done so, I would never admit it under the present circumstance.' Whereupon he left me abruptly. That night, for the first time since the Czarevitch's accident, the Czarina appeared at the dinner table. She seemed rested and optimistic and revealed that the boy was no longer complaining of pain, and that the imperial household would return to St. Petersburg within a week. The physicians who were present looked somewhat uneasy. . . . A week later, when we departed for the capital city, I saw the young heir to the throne and spoke to him. He was in bed, playing contentedly, apparently not plagued by any pain."

The miraculous salvation of the Czarevitch aroused a veritable paroxysm of enthusiasm in those conservative and clerical circles who had sponsored Rasputin at Court. The Czarina was certain now of the saintliness of the Staretz, and cudgelled her brain how she might reward him. Since Rasputin refused to accept money from Their Majesties, the Empress herself embroidered coloured peasant blouses for him, wrote him gracious letters and not only paid increasing attention to his medical advice but to his political suggestions as well.

In the same degree that Rasputin's influence in the imperial family and reactionary circles was enhanced, revulsion against this mysterious miracle worker grew by leaps and bounds in all other circles of the capital city. The aristocrats were displeased because the Czarina preferred the company of an illiterate peasant to that of scions of old noble families; ministers and clergy complained that, in connection with important appointments, Rasputin's advice carried increasing weight and was by no means difficult to secure for a consideration.

Czar and Czarina heard more and more of Rasputin's activities from their entourage, but they ignored all warnings. Even when Bishop Hermogen and the Priest Illiodor, or Grandduchess Anastasia—the very people who had introduced Rasputin to the Court—now spoke of him as a Messenger of the Anti-Christ, the imperial couple assumed that the general resentment denoted jealousy because they were lending their ear to a simple representative of the people. Nicholas was exceedingly irritated by the interminable warnings against Rasputin, insisting that just as anyone else in Russia, the Czar was entitled to a private life. Once, when a minister drew attention to

Rasputin's activities with especial emphasis, the Czar remarked wearily : " Perhaps you are correct but I beg of you never to mention Rasputin to me again."

The only concession eventually wrung from Their Majesties was the agreement that Madame Vyrubova's little house, and not the palace, would be used for further clandestine meetings with Rasputin. There, the imperial couple and Rasputin would gather for prayer meetings.

Meanwhile the people in St. Petersburg, shaking their heads gravely, told one another that the Czarina and the imperial daughters were in the habit of writing letters to the Staretz. Some of these missives eventually came into the possession of the Liberal politician, Gutshkov, and before long copies of the letters travelled from hand to hand. In one of them the Czarina wrote : " I have the feeling, as I listen to you, that my head is bowed and that the touch of your hand is upon me."

These writings, so open to misinterpretation, furnished fresh stimulus to the nefarious gossip that had preceded their discovery. Finally, after exerting great ingenuity, Minister of Interior Makarov, succeeded in obtaining possession of the original letters. When he was next received in audience by the Czar he informed the ruler of the gossip occasioned by these letters, submitting six originals.

The Czar's face turned chalky as he examined them. " These letters are genuine," he admitted in a strange voice, and threw the packet into his desk drawer.

Soon thereafter, Makarov was relieved of his post.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### A MINISTER SPEAKS HIS MIND

**V**LADIMIR NICHOLAIEVITCH KOKOVZOV, Premier and Minister of Finance of the Russian Empire, was an order-loving, pedantic, and careful man. Every night he jotted down the events of that day and made a memorandum of the duties for the morrow. An overworked man, he merely needed to glance at his agenda to inform himself of the tasks and interviews awaiting him.

When the Minister glanced at his calendar on Monday, the 12th of February, 1912, he observed that the most important appointment for the following day was a visit to the Dowager-Empress, Maria Feodorovna.

The Minister had received the old Empress's invitation only the day before, when Maria Feodorovna's lady-in-waiting, Elizabeth Naryshkina-Kurakina, had called on him. The brief time between the invitation and the date of reception convinced the Minister that the Dowager-Empress wished to discuss something important with him.

The morning of the 13th of February was cold and foggy. The snow crunched under the wheels of the Minister's coach as it drew up before the palace of the Dowager-Empress at ten in the morning.

"Thank you so much for coming," the old lady greeted Kokovzov as he entered her little *salon*. "I know I am interfering with your important work, nevertheless, I simply must speak with you."

The Minister kissed the Dowager-Empress's hand, ensconced himself in a deep chair, and gazed with respectful awe upon the cold, immobile face of Maria Feodorovna.

"Tell me, Vladimir Nicholaievitch," the old lady came directly to the point, "what do you know of these terrible rumours which not only agitate Court society, but even are reported in the public press? Time and again I have been forced to listen to distasteful talk concerning a Siberian peasant by the name of Rasputin. It is all especially painful to me since my son and daughter-in-law recently have figured in the gossip. I have heard that something dreadful happened a short time ago. You, as Prime Minister, are far better informed than anybody else. Therefore, I beg you to tell me what you know."

Kokovzov remained silent, obviously embarrassed. The affair at which the old Empress hinted was unsuitable for a lady's ears. Nevertheless Maria Feodorovna's manner was so imperious that the Minister decided to speak up despite his discomfiture.

"Your Majesty knows," he began in a low voice, "that for some

time already the peasant Rasputin is playing a prominent role in the circle of the high clergy surrounding Their Imperial Majesties. It seems that, recently, some of the clerics have been assailed by certain doubts as to this man. The scandal, at which Your Majesty just hinted, unquestionably refers to a violent argument on the evening of the 15th of January. It occurred in the Jaroslav Hospital on Vasiliev Islands, where Hermogen, Bishop of Saratov, is residing temporarily.

"As you know, Bishop Hermogen and Priest Illiodor, who are very close to the Court, formerly were Rasputin's protectors and friends. Now, however, this state of affairs seems to have undergone a change. The Bishop, supported by the Priest, reproached Rasputin when he appeared in his residence on the 15th of January. They objected to the dissolute life of the peasant and demanded that he return to his Siberian village immediately and forever.

"Rasputin answered by indulging in wild Siberian curses, whereupon Illiodor—temperamental man that he is—unloosed a stream of vulgar invectives. They roared at each other and finally came to blows. Indeed, it is quite possible that the bishop and the priest came within a hair's breadth of strangling Rasputin. The scene was so violent that Mitja Koljaba, inadvertently witnessing it, suffered one of his frequent epileptic attacks and, with foaming mouth and twitching limbs, fell to the floor—an incident which served to return Bishop and Priest to a more sober procedure."

Kokovzov paused for a moment and looked questioningly at the Dowager-Empress before continuing:

"As far as I am personally concerned I have neither spoken to Rasputin nor have I ever seen him. I am absolutely at a loss to explain how, the very same day, this peasant succeeded in informing His Majesty that the two clergymen had set a trap for him in order—I beg Your Majesty's pardon—to emasculate him. The Czar was highly incensed when he heard of it and declared that such a crime would be worse than robbery in broad daylight.

"Most probably, Your Majesty knows the end of the story. Bishop, Priest, and Mitja have all been exiled to distant monasteries by order of the Czar. Rasputin, however, is running everywhere now, bragging of his influence and friendship with the imperial house. Incidentally, private letters addressed to him by the Czarina and the young grandduchesses have actually been shown around in Court circles. That is all, Your Majesty."

During Kokovzov's report the frigid face of the Empress-Mother had assumed a grave expression. By the time the Minister had come to the end of his recital, however, the countenance of the old woman was completely transformed. She appeared to be in the throes of deep emotion. Trembling with excitement, her eyes brimming with tears, she arose and stumbled to the window. She turned her back to Kokovzov, but she could not hide the fact that her shoulders were shaking. The Empress-Mother was sobbing like a heart-broken child.

"Poor unfortunate Alix," she sighed after an interval. "She



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simply does not see that she is ruining the dynasty and herself. She really believes in the saintliness of this charlatan, and none of us can forestall the disaster that is inevitable."

The Minister was amazed at the old lady's great distress. To be sure, the scandal was unfortunate. But, after all, the role Rasputin played was not so important that it could possibly lead to the end of the dynasty. It certainly was odd to hear the old Empress voice such far-fetched fears.

The Minister grew thoughtful, however, when, upon returning to his office, he found a letter on his desk. Written in a scrawling hand and misspelt atrociously, the missive certainly did not fit into the dignified atmosphere of a Prime Minister's study. It read :

"Want to go away altogether. Want to see you. Everybody talking about me now. You tell me when. Address : 12 Kirotschnaja, care of Sasonov. Rasputin."

So that enigmatic peasant actually had dared to approach the highest officer of the realm directly. Impelled partly by curiosity, partly by prudence, Kokovzov resolved to receive the peasant three days hence. Mamontov, an old friend of Rasputin's, who also happened to be related to the Minister, was to be present as a witness.

Kokovzov was a circumspect, industrious official. For decades, he had moved in a world of accurate data, diagrams, and calculations. To him the universe was just a system composed of exact figures and formulas. He subtracted and added feelings and passions in the same way that he balanced the budget of the Russian Empire. He utterly lacked understanding for supernatural visions, metaphysical phenomena and mystical confessions of faith. That much-talked of *mushik* who—God alone knew how and why!—had been selected from a crowd of *jurodovi* as some sort of ephemeral hero, aroused the Minister's interest only because of his puzzling relations to the imperial family and, in this way, to the mechanism of government.

It was late in the evening when a tall peasant, about forty years of age, strode into the Minister's study. He appeared at once robust and haggard. His huge head was covered with long, unkempt hair which fell to his shoulders. A dark scar—probably a souvenir of a long-forgotten brawl—marred his forehead. His prominent nose was broad, fleshy, and pock-marked. His face, sunburned and wrinkled, was covered by a scrubby black beard.

The peasant Rasputin studied the Prime Minister. His eyes—small, piercing, close-set, and grey in colour—were tantalizing in their strange mobility and seemed to hide a disturbing and bewildering world.

Kokovzov describes his meeting with Rasputin as follows : "He looked at me long and penetratingly, as if he meant to hypnotize me. Suddenly he jerked his head back and stared at the ceiling, his eyes scrutinizing the stucco ornaments overhead. Then, just as abruptly, he shifted his gaze to the floor and kept his silence without stirring. I had the feeling that he would remain in that senseless attitude for all

eternity. I therefore addressed him somewhat impatiently : ' Well, you wanted to see me. Now what is it you wish ? We can't linger here until to-morrow morning.' At my words, Rasputin's face assumed a stupid, half-idiotic smile. Finally he murmured : ' Want nothing. Just looking what a high room this is.' Then he relapsed into silence once more, his head thrown back, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

" This awkward situation persisted until Mamontov's arrival. The two kissed and Mamontov asked Rasputin whether he had definitely made up his mind to return home. At this, Rasputin foisted his cold gaze upon me and demanded : ' Well, shall I go away ? Don't like this kind of life any more. What is all this gossip about me, anyway ? '

" I replied : ' It would be an excellent idea for you to leave. After all, it makes little difference whether all this talk is just hearsay or truth. You know you don't really belong here. Moreover, you are hurting the Czar by your appearance in the palace, and especially by bragging of your close relations to the throne. Because of that, all those startling stories and rumours have spread about ! '

" ' Whom did I tell what ? ' Rasputin shouted in a high falsetto. ' I don't care to go to the palace. Why am I dragged there ? '

" Mamontov interrupted him : ' Let's be candid, Grigori Efimovitch,' he declared unctiously. ' Indeed, you talk far too much. But this is not the only thing that is important. You must remember that the palace is not the right place for you. Things will come to a bad ending if you remain there. Not for you, perhaps, but possibly for the Czar, because already his holy name is used in vain.'

" Rasputin, ensconced in a deep chair, listened to Mamontov silently, his eyes downcast. When he had ceased speaking, the room was plunged into a silence that lasted unbearably long. Tea was served. Rasputin seized a piece of cake in his claw-like hand and threw it into his glass, again fixing his searing gaze upon me. These repeated attempts to hypnotize me became annoying. ' Your glances at me won't do any good,' I observed testily. ' Let us talk plainly. Don't you think Mamontov is right ? '

" Rasputin looked away, stretched in his chair, then, smiling insanely, said : ' Suits me. I go. But don't let them call me back—if I am one who could hurt the Czar.'

" I attempted to direct the conversation into different channels. We spoke of the situation in Siberia and Rasputin discoursed not only intelligently, but showed himself to have a remarkably keen perception of affairs. However, when I exclaimed : ' Now, you see, this is splendid, we will agree, somehow,' he seemed startled, threw his head back, and incoherently mumbled something like : ' Good. I am a ne'er-do-well. I leave. Let them get along without me. Why do they call me right along ? They want me to speak on one thing, the other thing, about this and that.' Then he jumped up suddenly, stared at me for a moment, and muttered : ' Well, now that we know each other, good-bye.' So saying, he strode from the room."

Two days later Kokovzov rendered his usual weekly report to the

Czar. After current questions had been discussed, Kokovzov requested permission to speak of something special. The Czar nodded in agreement, whereupon the Prime Minister described his interview with Rasputin. Kokovzov pointed out that, according to his mind, the peasant's boast that he stood very close to the throne had done considerable damage to the all-highest family.

The Czar listened in silence; only after the report was finished he inquired casually: "Did you advise Rasputin that you would exile him if he did not leave of his own accord?"

"Your Majesty," Kokovzov replied, "it is not my prerogative to exile anybody. Besides, there was no reason for it since Rasputin declared his readiness to leave."

The Czar seemed satisfied. "I have been told," he declared, "that you and the Minister of the Interior intended to banish Rasputin from my capital city without first informing me. I am very glad that I was misinformed. It would pain me if somebody were to suffer because of the imperial family."

As Kokovzov was leaving, the Czar suddenly asked: "By the way, how did this *mushik* impress you?"

"He made the worst possible impression upon me, Your Majesty," was the frank reply. "During my one-hour conversation with him I formed the opinion that he is a typical Siberian vagabond. He belongs to that great mass of Russian 'barefooters' who rove from village to village, usually hiding a criminal past, and not averse to availing themselves of any and all means of reaching their goal. If I may make so bold as to express myself candidly, I certainly would not like the idea of meeting that man in a dark alley. His appearance is revolting, his manners uncouth, and his air of simplicity is false and affected."

The Czar did not say a word during all this. However, he looked out of the window—an unmistakable sign that he did not approve of the conversation. Only when Kokovzov concluded with the assurance that he had considered it his duty to speak to the Czar, Nicholas forced a friendly smile and asserted that he appreciated the Prime Minister's candour. "By the way," the monarch added, "I hardly know this peasant. I merely caught a glimpse of him on two or three occasions."

The conversation between Czar and Minister took place at eleven in the morning; at four that same afternoon the Staretz was informed of it in detail. "So that's the kind of fellow he is," Rasputin said of Kokovzov. "Well, good, let him. . . . Each one as he can." At the same time, in accordance with his promise, he left the capital city.

Upon bidding farewell to the Czarina, the Staretz exclaimed dramatically: "I know that evil people strain every effort to rob me of your and the Emperor's affection. Pray, do not listen to them. And remember this: if we should ever be separated, you will lose your son and your crown within half a year."

Alexandra Feodorovna burst into tears and, grovelling at the feet of the peasant Rasputin, implored his blessings.

At the next Court reception the Czarina extended her hand to the

Prime Minister with obvious reluctance. The courtiers, who knew only too well how to interpret those tell-tale red blotches on the Czarina's face, quickly concluded that despite the pronounced affability of the Czar, despite the many merits of the Prime Minister, Kokovzov's dismissal was only a question of time. They were not mistaken.

The day after Kokovzov's dismissal, Nicholas II met the old Empress-Mother in the imperial box of the opera house. "Now why did you do that?" Maria Feodorovna demanded.

The Czar's eyes held a wistful expression as he answered: "Do you think it was easy for me? I shall tell you all about it another time. I realize it is simple enough to dismiss a minister, but it is very hard to admit to oneself that one should never have done it."

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### THREE HUNDRED YEARS

**I**N the winter of the year 1913 Russia celebrated the three-hundred-year reign of the House of Romanov. Silence—tense and expectant—descended upon the Empire. Ministers, courtiers, peasants, popes and revolutionaries waited in vain for a word from the Czar which, rising above the ringing of the country's church bells, would bring good tidings to the people. Steeped in legend, the Czar's mighty mansion on the banks of the Nordic Neva remained mute. Not one word of imperial grace came from behind its formidable walls. The gates of the ruler's house were not swung wide to receive illustrious guests. Only once, on the 20th of March, 1913, did the imperial family drive through the streets of the capital city amidst an oppressive silence. The entourage prayed in Kazan Cathedral. There the Patriarch of Antiochia implored divine blessing for the Most Orthodox Czar. In the evening the Emperor received the representatives of the nobility, and the Czarina appeared in the great hall of the Nobility Club for the last time, adorned with the crown jewels. And for the last time the imperial family mingled with the society of St. Petersburg at a gala performance of Glinka's *Life for the Czar* at the Maria Theatre.

That night, when the monarch appeared in the box, he was received by the strains of the national anthem. The four centre boxes, which had been reserved for the members of the dynasty, did not seem large enough for all the pomp. The Empress was arrayed in a snow-white velvet robe, emblazoned with the blue chain of the Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew, and wore a tiara of sparkling diamonds. Her immobile face was enigmatic and of a ghostly pallor. She stared ahead as one who is tortured by painful thoughts. Not even for the fraction of a second did a smile relieve her sombre countenance. The granddukes in the adjacent box clearly observed how belaboured was her breath, how the fan trembled in her white, almost transparent, hand. The first act of the opera had scarcely finished when the Czarina arose and left the box hastily.

On the evening following the gala performance Alexandra Feodorovna sobbed on Madame Vyrubova's shoulder: "I could not help remembering how once, when I still had my health and youth, I visited that very same theatre with the Emperor, and how, on our return to the palace, the two of us enjoyed a little supper before an open fire in his study. . . . Look at me now, I am just a ruin."

In celebration of the tercentenary, the imperial family travelled through the country. Like a pious pilgrim, the Czar was on his way to the cradle of his family, to the little wooden house of the boyar Romanov

that still stood in the dreamy city of Kostroma. On a small river steamer, the ruler passed the old cities whose very names conjured up the intoxicating beauty of golden icons. Step by step he retraced the historical trip which, in the spring of 1613, had taken Michael Romanov from Kostroma to the Kremlin of Moscow. Like illustrations for an old saga, the bulbous spires of churches, serving as landmarks of the steppes, arose along the Volga. In the ancient city of Vladimir, Nicholas II, striding through lanes of kneeling *mushiks*, entered the six-hundred-year-old cathedral of Prince Andrew Bogolyubsky. In the twilight of the venerable edifice miraculous icons looked down upon the Czar in all their Byzantine splendour of colour.

In Nishny Novgorod, the national anthem was intoned in the wide market square where, three hundred years ago, a butcher called Minin had laid the corner-stone of Romanov power in a fiery speech. In Jaroslav, Nicholas knelt before the old Bishop Tichon; he was to ascend the throne of the orphaned Church four years later, following the monarch's abdication.

Icy winds blew over Kostroma and its fairy-tale-like little houses dotting the terraced banks of the river. The gilded cupolas of old churches rose above the city majestically. White flurries whirled through the streets and squares, and the old city became animated with pale wraiths. The icebound river hid from the nocturnal storm beneath a blanket of pure, glittering white.

Kostroma had been slumbering for fully three hundred years. All that time, the houses, the churches, the streets, and the squares had been dreaming of the robust tribe of Romanovs who had sprung from this city and gone out to rule the world. The huge bells of the church, swayed by the wind, spread a canopy of silvery chimes over the enchanted city, bringing back the spirit of bygone centuries. The entire Empire re-echoed with the monotonous melody of the church bells of Kostroma, to the accompanying solemn chant of church choirs. The song of the bells filled all Russia. Amidst sweet-smelling clouds of incense a thousand flaring candles spluttered.

The silvery echo of the bells awakened Kostroma—cradle of the Romanovs—from its enchanted spell. Three hundred years had passed since the boyar scion Michael had left Ipatiev monastery on the opposite bank of the Volga. He had embarked upon a road which, one day, would end in the death of his descendants in the cellar of the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg.

In the frosty winter nights of the year 1913 the church bells of the ancient city of Kostroma resounded with the legend of three centuries. It had been on the 21st of February, 1613, that the cossacks and the sons of the boyars had shouted outside the doors of the Kremlin: "We want Michael Romanov for Czar! He is young and simple!" Two months later Princes Pojarsky and Trubetzkoi handed the hat of the monomachist to the new Czar as the symbol of his reign.

The bells rang out their sombre tale. Alexius followed Michael to the throne; although he had been dubbed "The Very Quiet," his

realm was shaken by the mutiny of the rebel Stenika Rasin. . . . After Michael came Feodor, who tolled the church bells and prayed perpetually. . . . And then came Peter the Great, who affected German attire, ruled with a heavy hand, and took a maidservant of Riga for his wife. . . . Upon her death, Peter II became Czar. He was young and died of small-pox. . . . After him reigned his wife, Anna Ivanova. She loved a stable groom from Riga and built an ice palace for her Court jester. . . . Following her, two-year old Ivan VI wore the crown of the Romanovs for 404 days, paying for his short-lived glory with twenty years of captivity. . . . He was followed in turn by the beautiful Elizabeth, who danced the minuet with her soldiers and, loving life, abolished capital punishment. . . . Her nephew, Peter III, was a dolt who enjoyed playing soldiers, and was strangled. . . . After him, his wife, Catherine the Great, ascended the throne. She conquered countries, kissed Potemkin, and wrote her memoirs. . . . Her son Paul reigned for only five years. He exiled whole regiments to Siberia, loved the people, and had ambitions to conquer India. He, too, was strangled. . . . And then a sphinx, named Alexander, succeeded as ruler, and he subdued Napoleon. . . . Thereafter, Nicholas I reigned for thirty years. A stern man, destined to die of poisoning, he was called "The Stick." . . . His son, Alexander II, who liberated the *mushiks*, suffered from asthma and smoked more than was good for him. He was assassinated. . . . And for thirteen years after him—powerful and strong—Alexander III sat upon the throne of the Romanovs. . . .

Alexander III was followed by Nicholas II. Frail of stature and born on the day of the patient sufferer Job, he was an accursed man, burdened with an ailing son.

The city of Kostroma received the Czar as if awakening from a dream. Burghers and peasants crowded the squares. The long, dark beards of the men were moist with their tears. In a paroxysm of ecstasy, the people threw themselves at the Czar's feet. Women and children strained every effort to catch just one glance of the Czarina. The imperial family was devoid of all protection as they passed through the wide streets to the old castle, since here at the cradle of his family the thirteenth of the Romanovs had no reason to fear assassination.

Houses and churches, men and beasts—all gloried in the refulgent light of czardom. The whole city resembled an incarnate saga of a czar, happy and beloved. Amidst all the jubilation, nobody noticed how Staretz Rasputin—an enigmatic smile on his face—crossed himself fervently, like some evil sorcerer, in a far corner of the cathedral.

When the Czar's steamer left Kostroma, young and old gathered at the river banks as if they knew that, for a long time to come, no Russian Czar would again put foot upon the sacred soil of Kostroma. Shrieking and babbling, the people threw themselves into the river from the steep banks, seeking to swim after the Czar's steamer. Many of them sank to their death in the cold waters but even then, reaching

toward the slight, scarcely visible figure of the Czar with cramped fingers, they shouted words of love and loyalty after him.

Standing on the bridge of the steamer, the Czarina pointed to the golden cupolas of Kostroma and exclaimed, in joyous accents, to her lady-in-waiting : " Now you can see what cowards these ministers are who frighten the Emperor so unnecessarily with their talk of revolution. All we need to do is just show ourselves to the people, and immediately their hearts are ours."

These words were spoken in spring, 1913, on the eve of the Great War. Five years later the people of Kostroma, and all the other peoples of the Russian Empire, were to raise the red flag of revolution over their old churches ; the church bells throughout the country announcing an end to the reign of the House of Romanov.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### WAR

**A**S it slowly disappeared behind the hills of Krassnoje Selo, the setting sun cast a golden sheen over the old church. High above the wide valley, packed with people, soared a flock of aeroplanes. Drenched by the rays of the sun, the enormous field resembled a multi-coloured Persian carpet.

First softly, then increasingly louder, finally assuming the proportions of an avalanche of sound, there arose, like the reverberations of a distant earthquake, wild huzzas. Resounding from the throats of sixty thousand men, the cry swept along with the power of a tornado, threatening to shatter the entire trembling earth to atoms in a single mighty blow. The colourful parade uniforms of the soldiers seemed like so many red and blue flowers studding a green meadow. A movement, as quick as lightning, flashed across the field. Glittering swords cut through the air, and regimental colours were solemnly dipped in salute.

The Czar appeared at the entrance of an ornately decorated tent.

It was the 22nd of July, 1914. On the enormous parade grounds of Krassnoje Selo whole army divisions had been assembled for the Czar to lead in splendid review past his illustrious guest, Monsieur Raymond Poincaré, President of the French Republic.

The Czar mounted his horse and passed the grandstand, crowded with representatives of the Government, and foreign diplomats. He was followed by a carriage drawn by four milk-white steeds and conveying—leaning against white silken cushions—Czarina, Czarevitch and, garbed in *bourgeois* black, the French statesman. Minister and diplomats bowed deeply, the last rays of the setting sun playing over their uniforms.

Directly in front of the grandstand, in the colourful costume of a Hungarian magnate, stood Count Szapary von Szapar-Mura-Szombat and Szechy Sziget, Ambassador of His Apostolic Majesty, the Emperor-King of Austria-Hungary. Close to the Magyar, his clear blue eyes focused in the distance, his right hand stroking his pointed, grey beard, stood Count Friedrich von Pourtalès, Ambassador of the German Kaiser. A little to the side, his monocle lending him the appearance of a wise old eagle, loomed the impressive figure of Maurice Paléologue, heir to the Emperor of Byzantium, now representing the French Republic at the Court of the Russian Czar. Next to him, smiling in friendly fashion at a grey-haired, taciturn Englishman, stood a bony man with a prominent nose and a finely chiselled mouth, looking like

nothing so much as a cunning fox, ready to leap upon his prey. This man was Sergius Sasanov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The dull reverberating report of a cannon announced sunset. At that moment a strange melodic sound arose all over the field. While the massed bands of all the Czar's Guard regiments intoned the evening prayer, sixty thousand soldiers sank to their knees, before their ruler, and, almost drowning the music, rhythmically chanted the Lord's Prayer.

On the following day, during the great reception at Peterhof, the invited guests marched past the Czar while the bands of the Guard regiments played the "Marseillaise" in honour of the head of the French Republic. The courtiers stood at attention as the Czar's palace echoed with the challenging measures of the revolutionary song. "*Allons enfants de la patrie*," the granddukes hummed, and smiled somewhat superciliously. Even then, the selfsame melody was being sung by fifty thousand workers in the factories and in the suburbs of the Neva capital. However, while in the great hall of Peterhof the Czar listened to the stirring strains to do honour to his guest from Paris, the song rang out in the quarters of the labourers as a protest against the cutlasses and lances of the Imperial Cavaliers' Guard.

A veritable deluge of strikes was inundating Russia at that time. As late as on the 18th of July, 1914, the *Rjctsh* of St. Petersburg wrote: "To-day fifty thousand workers were on strike. At different points in the capital city groups of workers congregated, singing revolutionary songs, but they were soon dispersed." Three days later the same newspaper reported: "Traffic in Moscow has been stopped during the protest strikes of the workers." And the next day the paper spread the news: "In the Vyborg district revolutionaries set upon policemen on repeated occasions. In Flugov Street barricades were erected but they were stormed by the police."

As the report of the last salvoes, fired by the police, died away, Monsieur Lemaître arrived from Paris. He had been especially ordered to St. Petersburg for the purpose of arranging the flowers for the great gala dinner at the French Embassy. During that dinner—just as during the great reception at Peterhof—the guests exchanged significant glances. Once more, as in Peterhof, the Czar absented himself for a private conference with his guest, Raymond Poincaré. While his courtiers spoke in awed whispers, the Czar discussed with Poincaré current political topics, such as the tension of Greek-Turkish relations; the somewhat strange position Bulgaria had assumed in regard to the Balkan problem; the arrival of Prince Wied in Albania; and, finally, the recent assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian crown, and the conflict which subsequently had developed between the Dual Monarchy and Serbia.

When the President of the French Republic boarded the armoured-cruiser, *La France*, on the 23rd of July, the consensus among the diplomats was that a general European conflict had been averted. Indeed, the newspapers of the capital city dedicated their columns

almost exclusively to the trial of the rich M. Prosolov who had murdered his paramour in the restaurant "Jar"; to the case of Madame Caillaux; to a South-American dance, called "tango"; and to the disturbing fact that, according to official information in St. Petersburg alone, no less than 120,000 workers had gone on strike.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning when President Poincaré left St. Petersburg; at six in the evening of the same day, Baron Giesl, Austrian minister to Belgrade, served an ultimatum on the Serbian Government which eventually was to decide the fate of the Old World.

In the week that followed old friendships were broken, new enmities stretched their tentacles to every corner of the world, armies lined up along the borders, diplomats frantically demanded their passports, and the Czar's face assumed a wan and worried expression. At night-fall the Anointed of the Lord went into the subterranean crypt of Feodorov Cathedral to pray, often remaining until the break of dawn. In the stillness of the chapel he earnestly besought the Lord's guidance.

During the day, however, the Czar sat at his desk with an expressionless face. Antechambers of the palace were crowded with bespurred granddukes, bemedalled generals, anxious admirals, and weary diplomats, while the Czar's desk was flooded with telegrams and reports, warnings, and impassioned pleas, some imploring him to maintain peace, others beseeching him, with equal fervour, to draw the sword.

The Czar read everything with his customary calm. But between the lines of most respectful reports, from dark corners of his study, even from the chests of bemedalled generals and from the very walls and windows—indeed, wherever he looked—one inescapable vision pursued him: The enigmatic smile on the countenance of William II, German Kaiser.

The life of the Czar and that of the German Kaiser criss-crossed in the strangest manner. The Czar regarded his imperial neighbour with an odd mixture of hate and love. Deep down in his heart Nicholas II knew that, in the eyes of the world, the German Kaiser cut a more brilliant, more impressive, more glamorous figure than the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias. William II was taller than Nicholas II by two heads—a physical advantage seemingly matched by the mental superiority he enjoyed over the Czar. Whenever the two monarchs met, the Czar's feeling of inferiority increased; in his belaboured style, he had to read a prepared speech from a sheet of paper, while the Kaiser, in free and forceful fashion, addressed his audiences without the benefit of even a brief memorandum.

There was something imperious and masterful in all the gestures of the German Kaiser. His letters, too, expressed distinct superiority with friendly advice assuming the tone of a moralistic sermon. In the presence of William II the Czar always experienced the disconcerting feeling of being returned to the classroom of his boyhood.

Whenever he listened to the Kaiser's speeches, the Czar invariably fell under their spell. It was this incomprehensible, undefinable influence which William exerted over him that Nicholas never could forgive. After all, the scion of the Romanovs was autocrat of an Orthodox country while the scion of the Hohenzollerns was merely the Lutheran monarch of a constitutional empire. The Czar was the tenth emperor of his dynasty, whereas only the grandfather of William II had received the Kaiser's crown from the hand of Bismarck. The Czar reigned over a continent, the Kaiser over only one of the European countries. Notwithstanding all this, whenever Czar and Kaiser met William II seemed superior to Nicholas II in every respect.

As twilight descended upon the palace the Czar decided the future of his realm. Like Nemesis—strange and evil—the spectre of war bore down upon him—a war which seemed as inevitable to him as his own tragic fate. In the twilight of that evening the Czar reiterated the words he once had chosen from the Book of Job as the motto of his life: "I was scared by terror, but ever and again it returneth and whatever I fear, it always assails me." The biblical sentences stirred the Czar deeply, the words impressing him as an old prophecy expressly written to characterize his own life. Born on the day of the patient sufferer Job, the Czar viewed the many tribulations imposed upon him as a mystical repetition of the agonies his patron saint had endured. "Believe me," Nicholas II once said to one of his ministers, "I am the ill-fated Czar! And this is far more than just a premonition on my part. I am firmly convinced that painful trials will be my share and that I shall not receive any reward in this world."

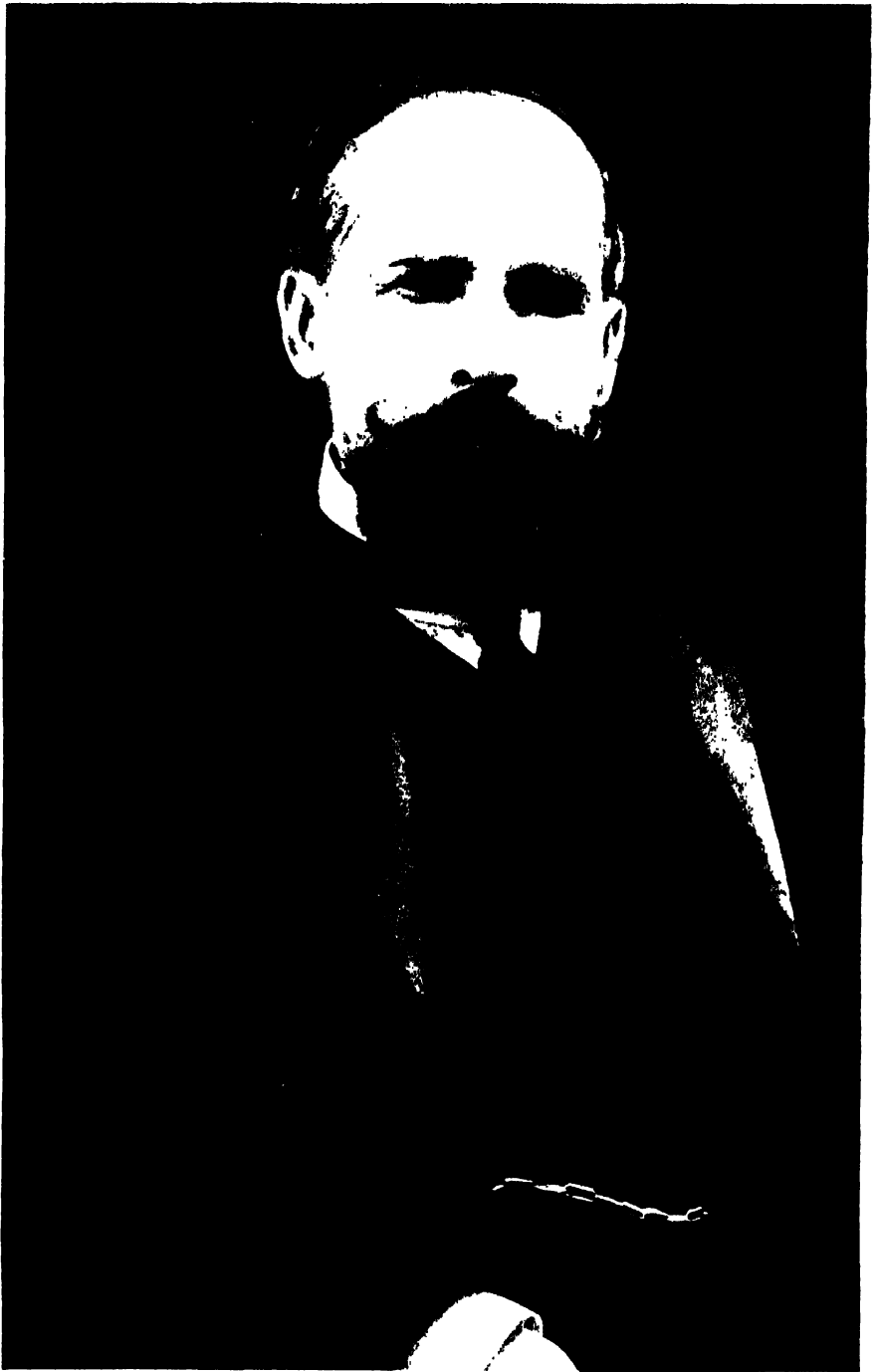
The thought of his tragic fate paralysed the Czar. All mortal exertions seemed futile to him. The threat of approaching war seemed to strike at his soul with the ferocity of a beast of prey, and even when the very last warning of his people reached him, he shook it off as a wanderer shakes off the dust of the road.

The last warning of the Russian people reached the Czar in the form of a telegram from the distant Siberian city of Tiumen. It read: "Beware of war. The people will once more raise the cry: 'Down with this and down with that!' You must not start a war. Nothing good will come of it for you and your heir. Rasputin."

Heedlessly the Czar thrust the message aside. The decision over peace and war had already been made. Stout, bald-headed, white-eyed Vladimir Suchomlinov—with the smile of a victor—had taken away with him, in his brief-case, the imperial ukase on mobilization.

Night descended upon the palace like the black wings of an evil, sinister bird. With mechanical punctuality, the Czar retired to his bedroom shortly before midnight. Mechanically, he divested himself of his clothes. The valet opened the door to the bathroom. The bath already drawn, the Czar stepped in and locked the door.

At midnight the valet knocked on the bathroom door. His voice trembled as he explained: "It is very urgent, Your Majesty, a telegram from His Majesty, the German Kaiser!" The Czar dried his



APIN, APPOINTED PREMIER



hands, opened the door, and broke the seal of the telegram. Drops of water dripped upon the fateful message from his wet hair. The words danced before his eyes, chasing each other as if in a mad vortex. Finally the Czar grasped the meaning of the short sentences: "If Russia mobilizes, entire burden of decision rests on your shoulders and you will be responsible for war or peace."

The Czar slipped into his bathrobe and went through his bedroom into the adjacent room of the valet. There was a telephone and the Czar raised the receiver. While the valet discreetly departed, closing the door, Nicholas asked to be connected with the office of the Minister of War.

The startled voice of Suchomlinov came over the wire. Expecting no good news, the Minister of War listened intently. "Suchomlinov," the Czar's voice reached him, "do you understand me clearly? I hereby give you the definite order to revoke the mobilization immediately and to cancel all measures in connection with it. Please repeat my order."

The white eyes of the Minister of War widened in despair; beads of perspiration formed on his large nose. Was this little colonel of the Preobrashensky Guard actually going to spoil the ingenious plans of a general, evolved after years and years of painstaking toil? Suchomlinov shook his head violently, drops of sweat rolling off his nose.

"Your Majesty," he declared, his voice unsteady from excitement, "the mobilization of the entire Russian army is in full swing. If we revoke orders already issued we shall face a catastrophe."

The Czar's reply sounded calm but imperious: "I will not listen to any objections. Kindly carry out my orders!"

Suchomlinov was exasperated to the point of tears. "Your Majesty, a mobilization is not a mechanism that can be turned on and off as one pleases."

"Will you please repeat my order?" the Czar interrupted. He listened, nodded, then hung up the receiver.

The generals left the salvation of the endangered mobilization to a professional diplomat, Minister of the Foreign Affairs, Sasanov. Early next morning, an ingratiating smile on his face, Sasanov stepped into the Czar's study as if into the room of an invalid. Words rolled off his tongue with all the soft enchantment of a melodious song. His eyes half-closed, the Czar drank in Sasanov's talk on the liberation of the Slavs, on the cleansing fires of war, and on the eternal battle between Slavs and Germans, now approaching an ultimate decision. "We can no longer avoid the war, Your Majesty," Sasanov asserted. "It is obvious that Germany is evading all attempts at mediation merely as a subterfuge to gain time. Under such circumstances, I don't believe Your Majesty should hesitate to proceed with general mobilization."

Suddenly the Czar raised his eyes. His face was drained of all colour. Planting both hands on his desk, his body bent slightly forward, he adjured hoarsely: "Remember, the responsibility I incur is on the

strength of your advice. Remember, this means sending thousands upon thousands to their death ! ”

Undisturbed, Sasanov reassured his ruler : “ Neither Your Majesty’s conscience nor my own will be burdened if war breaks out. Your Majesty and the Government have done everything to save the world from this terrible trial. But from now on we must think of the security of the realm. In all probability the war will start the very minute it has been scheduled for by Germany.”

The Minister thus reasoned with the Czar for a full hour ; during that time the fate of czardom was decided. Finally, in resolute accents, the Czar commanded : “ Very well, Sergius Dimitrievitch, telephone the General Staff to proceed with the general mobilization.”

That same day an imperial ukase was posted all over St. Petersburg. It was to decide the life and death of millions, ushering in the end of the old world and bringing debacle to four imperial thrones.

Three days after the outbreak of the war, the Czar appeared in the main hall of the Winter Palace. The room was filled with officers of the Guard. An altar arose in the centre of the hall, with the image of the Holy Mother of Kazan looking down upon the Czar sorrowfully. A hundred years had passed since the venerable Russian Field-Marshal Michail Larinovitch Kutusov had knelt before the holy image before going forth to war against Napoleon.

The Czar kissed the wood of the old icon. Then he raised his hand, and his officers imagined they were hearkening to the thundering fanfares of the Angel of Victory when Nicholas II made the pronouncement : “ Officers of My Guard, I swear that I shall not conclude peace until the last enemy has been driven off the soil of Our beloved country.”

All at once the Czar felt as if the words of this solemn oath were shackling his soul like a heavy chain of steel and he shuddered involuntarily. An invisible hand had cut him off from the past for ever. Even if he had violated his coronation oath by renouncing some of his autocratic prerogatives, he would keep the new oath he had just rendered to the end of his days. Nicholas II was willing to sacrifice his blood and the blood of his dynasty if he might only face the Supreme Judge immaculately.

The *Plurimos annos* of the officers shook the hall like a tornado. The impressive prayer resounding in his ears, the Czar fervently hoped that with his new oath the old curse of Job would be lifted from him. As he stepped out on to the balcony he felt relieved of all the pressure, accumulated during the last few days. An enormous multitude had congregated before the palace. In the inspired singing of his kneeling subjects, the Czar envisioned the radiant face of a new, united Russia arising, phoenix-like, from the fires of a great war. In that empire of the future no chasm would separate the Czar from his people ; the very thunder of the enemies’ cannon would break down all barriers. In the light of eternal glory the Czar’s flag, resembling a holy icon, would wave for ever over the realm.

Indeed, as if decreed by Providence, strikes and unrest ceased

throughout the country. In Moscow, Kiev, Kazan, and Simbirsk, the people knelt before the Czar's banners. Once more the spirit of old Holy Russia spread over the land and, for the first time since the glorious year of 1812, which witnessed the defeat of Napoleon, the Russian Empire stood like a rock of granite, proudly crowned by the majestic double-headed imperial eagle.

The morrow, however, was painfully devoid of cheering, singing masses. In Peterhof park the Elizabethan fountains murmured a melancholy refrain. The monarch sauntered slowly through the broad lanes shaded by old trees. Beside Nicholas, dwarfing his slight figure and endeavouring to keep in step with him, strode his gigantic uncle, Nicholai Nicholaievitch.

At the door of the dainty Catherinian pavilion "Fermé," the Grand-duke halted, bowed deeply, and waited for the Czar to enter first. Inside, at a conference table covered with green baize, ministers and generals were gathered. They sprang to their feet as the Czar reached the head of the table. The cheers of yesterday's multitudes still ringing in his ears, he explained to the dignitaries that, following the example of his exalted forebears, he himself would assume supreme command of the army in this difficult hour.

Dull silence greeted the announcement. The generals sat with their heads bent. In the sudden quiet, the splashing of the nearby fountains became audible to a disconcerting degree. Then, as if seeking to emulate the whispering waters, the soft, monotonous warning voices of ministers and generals descended upon the monarch.

"I beg Your Majesty, most humbly, not to leave your capital city. I have always advised Your Majesty as a true servant, according to my best knowledge. In this perilous hour, I implore Your Majesty to heed my warning."

"Your Majesty's most exalted forebear, Alexander I, was severely criticized because he did not remain in the capital city. All historians emphasize this fact, as Your Majesty doubtless knows."

"Your Majesty, this will be a very difficult war. Indeed, we may have to retreat during the first few weeks for strategic reasons. Your Majesty must not subject yourself to the risks of war."

The Czar remained silent; his joyous mood had deserted him. Jealousy, clearly discernible in the eyes of his generals, darkened the brilliant picture his mind had painted of himself as Commander-in-Chief. He paced up and down the room, followed by the anxious glances of the generals. His voice sounded weary and hollow, when, at last, he declared: "I shall not assume the supreme command. I herewith appoint, as Commander-in-Chief of my armies, His Imperial Highness, the Inspector-General of Cavalry, Commandant of the Guard, and Chief of the Military Area of St. Petersburg, Grandduke Nicholai Nicholaievitch." Suppressing a sigh, the Czar embraced his uncle and kissed him. The Great War had imposed a great renunciation upon Nicholas.

Thereafter, in the same measure in which generals and diplomats

rushed to the palace of the Grandduke on the Snamenka, it grew increasingly quiet around the Czar. One after another the other granddukes left for the front. The diplomats were everlastingly in conference with the Commander-in-Chief. Nicholas spent many hours of solitude and prayer in the little chapel of the Court cathedral. In accordance with tradition, he resolved to embark upon a pilgrimage to the resting-place of his forebears ; in the Holy Kremlin he would again summon all his peoples to arms.

On the 18th of August, 1914, the Czar entered the hall of the Holy George in the Kremlin at Moscow. The old ceiling of the enormous room trembled under the terrific vibration of the cheering crowds. Everybody present seemed to recall how, a hundred years previously, on the same holy spot, Alexander I had declared war on Napoleon.

Blackamoors, wearing silk turbans adorned with long, white plumes, swung open the doors for the Czar. Accompanied by the imperial family, Nicholas II strode through Vladimir's Hall. Ceremoniously the doors which gave on the Red Threshold where only a czar might set foot were flung wide for him. Even as the multitudes in Red Square gazed upon the Czar, the enormous bells of Ivan Velike resounded as mightily as on the day of coronation.

The people sank to their knees. The narrow, red carpet, spread from the palace to the Uspensky Cathedral, seemed a symbol of the bloody path of war upon which the Czar was embarking now. While he slowly strode through the crowd, wholly unprotected, women held up their children and men bent down to kiss the carpet trod by the Czar's foot. All over the wide square arose the solemn strains of the Czar's Hymn.

Holding the cross of Michael Romanov in his hand, the Metropolitan of Moscow bowed low before the Czar at the entrance to the church. Nicholas crossed himself, kissed the crucifix, and stepped into the semi-darkness of the cathedral where, eighteen years before, he had placed the crown of the realm upon his head.

Three metropolitans, twelve archbishops, and one hundred and ten archimandrites and abbots conducted the solemn prayers. The bright rays of the sun filtered through the high windows of the cathedral. In its reflection the diamonds, sapphires, and rubies on the popes' vestments, and the gold of the icons, gleamed in dazzling splendour. The mighty edifice reverberated with the sound of the 104th Psalm. The imperial daughters hid their tear-stained faces under large straw hats as the Metropolitan handed the Czar the miraculous golden crucifix inside of which was imbedded a precious splinter of the holy cross of the Redeemer. Clouds of incense enveloping the Emperor, he kissed the holy relic, visibly stirred. Then, accompanied by the clergy, he approached the icon of the Holy Mother of God of Vladimir. Kneeling before it, he fervently kissed the treasured image. Many centuries ago, when liberating Holy Russia from the yoke of the Tatars, Dimitri Donskoi, the Muscovite ruler, had had the icon carried before him in the victorious battle on Kulikov Field. Now, as then, the gracious

mien of the Mother of God seemed to promise victory to the ruler of the Orthodox realm.

The imperial family left the cathedral, the cheers of the people echoing all over Red Square. An exalted smile suffused the face of Alexandra Feodorovna ; her eyes stared into space. Suddenly the Czar arrested his steps. Turning towards the ambassadors of Great Britain and the French Republic, he cordially remarked : " Won't you please step forward, gentlemen. This acclaim is meant for you as much as it is for me."

Then the Czar proceeded as one in a dream, his face radiant, as he marched in the procession.

Even then, another procession was under way, plodding through the silence of Siberian steppes, through the plains along the Volga, across the mountains of the Ural, and through the cornfields of the Ukraine. Millions and millions of armed *mushiks* marched in response to the Czar's summons to arms which had re-echoed in the villages and settlements of the gigantic realm like a pope's call to prayer. In the heavy step of ten million peasants, eager for battle and ready to make every sacrifice, the great country heeded the last call of the Most Orthodox Czar, Nicholas Alexandrovitch, the thirteenth of the House of Romanov.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### THE MAGICAL TRIUMVIRATE

LIKE God's own messenger, Rasputin hastened from Siberia to St. Petersburg and from there to Czarskoje Selo to the house of Madame Anna Vyrubova. In jumbled sentences he cursed and blessed the war in the same breath. Utilizing his hypnotic power to its fullest measure, he sought to discover, in the expressionless face of Madame Vyrubova, at least a reflection of the thoughts and sentiments agitating Their Imperial Majesties. However, Madame Vyrubova's rosy and rubicund face was as devoid of expression as her brain was bare of ideas.

Madame Vyrubova was busy these days nursing wounded officers of the Guard. The Emperor was on a journey; the Empress in charge of a hospital. Czarina and grandduchesses assisted at operations. Stern of mien, her bluish lips compressed tightly, Alexandra Feodorovna demanded that she be permitted to lend assistance even in the most ghastly and revolting cases. To enhance her usefulness, the Czarina embarked upon a course of surgery. "At a quarter-past five in the morning," she wrote to the Czar, "we had an amputation at the base hospital. I assisted by handing the instruments to the surgeons, while Olga threaded the needles. . . . Then we were busy making dressings in one of the wards. I beheld unfortunate men, horribly injured. . . . I cleansed and dressed their wounds."

"My brain works incessantly," she wrote another time. "Hundreds of thoughts and possibilities assail me; try as I may, I simply cannot relax."

Under the burden of the duties which had descended upon her so suddenly, there was little time for the Czarina to indulge in mute meditations in Rasputin's company. Only now and then did she appear in Madame Vyrubova's house. Usually the Czarina was so preoccupied that the Staretz concluded pictures of operating-rooms were crowding out the pictures of mystical wonders which hitherto had filled her soul.

Alexandra Feodorovna spent sleepless nights. Plagued by nerve-shattering headaches and heavy of heart, she stared, until the dawn, into the milky sheen of St. Petersburg's white nights. A row of medicine bottles covered her night-table. Her face twisted with pain, she applied a headache pencil to her aching temples. She still could not fully grasp that the Emperor had to spend most of his time traveling, and that her homeland—her brothers, nephews, and cousins—now had become her enemies.

The Czarina never could forget that day when Madame Vyrubova,

in hat and coat, had rushed into the lavender boudoir like a whirlwind. Her round face flushed from excitement, her eyes filled with horror, she had gasped : " Your Majesty, we are mobilizing ! "

Alexandra Feodorovna had calmly confirmed the news : " Yes, thirteen army corps against Austria. "

" No, no, Your Majesty. General mobilization has been proclaimed. It is war against Germany ! "

The Czarina had blanched. Her hand, holding some embroidery, had trembled in a spasm of agony.

Once before—in the year 1912—she had succeeded in laying the ghost of a threatening war. That time, with the whole world arming because of unrest in the Balkan, Rasputin had stood at her side. His simple peasant mind rejected war. The Staretz had crashed his fist upon the table, had shouted, prophesied, and cursed with brutal frankness. Then, the Czar had thought Rasputin's voice echoed the voice of the entire Russian people. However, since the Staretz had left the capital city, it was the military who now went in and out of the imperial palace. The Czarina felt that her power over the Czar—gained during twenty years of incessant struggle—was waning ; gradually, but undeniably, it was slipping from her helpless grasp.

When Madame Vyrubova had brought her that fateful message, Alexandra Feodorovna had arisen and, hastening through her suite, had burst into the Czar's study. The glossy, lacquered door had shut behind her like the lid of a coffin. Madame Vyrubova, left alone, could distinguish excited voices. First the Czarina had talked and then the Czar had answered. The Czar's voice had grown louder and more nervous but, at the same time, firmer. Then, the Czarina had interrupted the Emperor. It had been impossible to understand what was said, but the sound of their voices had been enough to throw Madame Vyrubova into a panic. For the first time in all the years she knew the imperial couple the Czar actually had shouted at his consort.

Half an hour later the door of the study was flung open. Alexandra Feodorovna came rushing out, her face covered with red blotches, tears welling in her eyes. The picture of despair, she flung herself on a divan and sobbed : " This is the end. We are at war . . . and I was not even told about it ! "

In the afternoon the Czar came to the suite of his consort for tea. He was taciturn and gloomy and seemed more than a little bewildered. He explained to the Empress, somewhat apologetically : " I have no right to rescind the mobilization. German troops may invade Russia before long. Why, according to my information, they are fully mobilized already. How, then, can I assume such a responsibility for my people ? "

The Czarina suffered agonies. Not only her German relatives were to be considered, but the long row of Russian grandduchesses as well ; almost all of them, like herself, were " German brood-mares for the House of Romanov," to use Bismarck's descriptive phrase.

During long sleepless nights, the Empress tried to master the

conflicting feelings which tortured her. Her old animosity against the German Kaiser now flared into a burning hatred of the Prussians. Suddenly, it seemed to her that the little grandduchy of Hesse-Darmstadt was merely a subjugated province of the Reich, called upon to bleed to death for the higher glory of Prussian arms. Should Prussia be vanquished, would it not mean new liberty for her own native soil? True, her husband's armies would be fighting Hessian regiments but, just now, it appeared to Alexandra Feodorovna that Russia's armed forces set out primarily to smash the mailed fist of Prussianism which fettered Hesse-Darmstadt. With the same fervour with which protestant Alix had once embraced the Orthodox faith, she now lashed herself into bitter hatred against the country of her birth and its Kaiser who had engineered her marriage.

The Czarina believed that no matter how victoriously the war might end it would only bring fresh humiliations and agonies for her. During the Russo-Japanese War she had been sneered at as "that English woman"; now she felt that courtiers and aristocrats alike were pointing their fingers at her as "that German woman." Ladies of the Court, the Empress had been informed, were already criticizing her for her work in the hospital. They declared that it was beneath the dignity of a Czarina to cleanse the wounds of a simple *mushik*. Alexandra Feodorovna clearly perceived that the time was not distant when these same ladies would discuss how strange it was for the Russian Empress to dress, with false sympathy, the very wounds which the Czar's brave soldiers had suffered at the hands of the Czarina's German countrymen. Indeed, anti-German sentiment was so strong in the capital city that the German name, St. Petersburg, had been changed to the Russian Petrograd.

A half-suppressed sigh floated through the dark bedroom. Now, after twenty years of married life, the Czarina felt more alien and alone in her husband's country, more outcast than on that day when she had crossed the Russian border as "the blonde and happy Alix."

In this difficult time the ministers of the Czar, his supporters and advisers, seemed ill-suited to disperse the doubts of the Czarina or profess sympathy for her in her agony. Old Goremykin, who had been entrusted with the office of Prime Minister once more, appeared all but crushed under the burden of his duties and pessimistic reflections. "The Emperor apparently forgot," he remarked, "that the candles around my coffin are already lit." Old Count Frederiks, too, was rather decrepit by this time. In his senile preoccupation, he once attempted to leave through a window, assuming that it was a door. Another time he patted the Czar on the shoulder with friendly intimacy and asked: "Are you, too, invited to dine with Their Majesties?"

Vladimir Suchomlinov, Minister of War, struck the Czarina as even less dependable. A man of sixty-six, he was greatly under the influence of his wife, who was thirty-two years his junior. She was clever to the point of shrewdness, even seeming sinister because of her habitually furtive glances. Suchomlinov himself had engendered the Empress's

suspicion some years previously, through an unfortunate incident by no means of his own making. During a gala performance, when Suchomlinov and his wife had entered their box, the Czar had turned to his consort and remarked : " Just look at Suchomlinov's beautiful wife." Those few words, carelessly spoken, had sufficed to arouse Alexandra Feodorovna's jealousy. Thereafter every proof of favour which the Czar granted his Minister had been suspiciously observed by the Czarina.

The more the Empress considered the various people surrounding the Czar in this fateful hour, the deeper appeared the abyss which yawned at the very foot of the throne. Doubtless, while Nicholas II visited the fronts, leadership of the Government seemed to be slipping from his fingers. In nocturnal meditations the Czarina had premonitions of imminent disaster. On the wall of her bedroom hung a picture of Marie Antoinette, surrounded by her children. This portrait of the ill-starred queen looked down upon Alexandra Feodorovna like a fear-inspiring *memento mori*. During those haunted nights the fog of Petrograd conjured up white shadows to knock at her windows. In the bleak twilight the Empress imagined these wraiths were her unfortunate predecessors on the throne of the Romanovs. Taut and breathless with fear the Czarina listened for the relentless step of revolution drawing ever nearer. At last, tortured by doubts to the point of desperation, the Empress resolved to assume, besides the duties of a mother and hospital nurse, the burdens of Government as well. Although the Czar had embarked upon this bloody war without consulting her, nevertheless she must strain every effort to bring about a happy ending to the conflict.

Her letters to the Czar became ever more crowded with suggestions and warnings. " They must not only love you but they must also fear you."—" Stop this congress in Moscow. It is worse than the Duma."—" You are the autocrat and everybody should know it. If you give in only once, they will demand so much more of you the next time."—" When will soup kitchens be organized for the refugees and when will Moscow receive fuel ?"—" Did you remember to send a telegram to old King Peter ?"—" Why did you give the Preobrazhensky and Semionovsky regiments to Dshunkovsky ? This is far too great an honour in view of his nasty behaviour."

When the Czar hesitated to accept his consort's advice and wrote of his " feeble will," the Czarina replied in some annoyance : " I am fighting for my master and for our son." In another letter to him, filled with admonitions, she added caustically : " My dear, you are much too long-winded ! "

Whenever the Czar returned from the front to Petrograd for a few days' rest, the Empress made good use of the chance to entangle him in political discussions. If the Czar clung to his viewpoint, Alexandra Feodorovna resorted to desperate means to impose her will. She knew that she need only become hysterical and the Czar would promptly weaken. Many a trip which took the Emperor to the front was

unconsciously dictated by his desire to liberate himself—at least for a brief period—from the Czarina's imperious demands.

With the Czar's journeys becoming more frequent, the influence of the Czarina on the course of the ship of state became more pronounced. Her letters to the Czar were more feared by ministers and officials than ukases and orders issued by the Czar himself. The longer the Czar absented himself from Petrograd the more eager became the politicians to discover a direct approach to the well-spring of omnipotence. Soon they ascertained that the rigid wall behind which the Empress hid had only one breach: Madame Vyrubova's little house in Czarskoje Selo. At its entrance—like the Archangel Michael at the gate to paradise, and just as gigantic and mighty—stood Staretz Rasputin. Few surmised that Rasputin's power, since his recent return from Siberia, was limited to the little house of the Empress's former lady-in-waiting. Despite the fact that Alexandra Feodorovna frequently was too busy now to receive the saintly man, her devotion for the saviour of her son had remained unchanged. The peasant's utterances were one of various sources through which the Empress endeavoured to fathom the genuine needs of her people. Through the willing offices of Madame Vyrubova, the Czarina was informed of Rasputin's opinions on questions of politics, economics, and strategy. With trembling hand the Empress repeated the *mushik's* confused words in her letters to her husband.

Since the Staretz actually had brought succour to a number of unfortunates by securing imperial favours for them, his person was surrounded by a halo of pseudo-omnipotence. His modest quarters presently came to resemble a regular Court, and while the Czarina was convinced that she had found in Rasputin an intercessor between herself and God, politicians and financiers were only too ready to recognize in this strange man a willing agent. Political soldiers of fortune, schemers, and war profiteers congregated in the small apartment in 64 Gorochovaja Street where Rasputin resided. Ministers and bankers did their utmost to fish in the troubled waters of Rasputin's influence for titles and offices, imperial favours and monetary gains, unaware that meetings of the Staretz with Their Majesties were few and far between. Because the Emperor was certain, during the first months of the war, that God's blessings were with him, he felt no need of Rasputin's intercession. As in the case of the Czarevitch's accident in Spala, a tragic interlude was necessary to impress Their Imperial Majesties, once more, with Rasputin's magic powers.

At five o'clock in the afternoon of the 2nd of January, 1915, a train was derailed between Czarskoje Selo and Petrograd. Madame Vyrubova rode in a first-class compartment, directly behind the locomotive. Her coach was telescoped; only after hours of work was it possible to extract from the debris the horribly maimed body of the Empress's friend. A physician, examining her, refused to take the much-hated woman to a hospital. "You will die soon anyway, so it is senseless to take you away from here," he informed her brutally.

Nevertheless, at the special order of the Czarina, Madame Vyrubova was removed to Czarskoje Selo Hospital. There, Princess Hedroitz, physican in charge, also declared that the critically injured woman could live but a few hours at most. Czar and Czarina promptly rushed to Madame Vyrubova's bedside. In the presence of Their Majesties a priest performed the last rites, the Emperor blessed her, and the exhausted woman lapsed into a coma which the physicians predicted would bring death by the morrow.

Meanwhile, Countess Mathilde Witte's heavy black limousine raced along the highway from Petrograd to Czarskoje Selo. Prince Andronikov was inside; next to him, silent and immersed in thought, occasionally darting wild glances, sat Staretz Rasputin. The Prince, who had informed the peasant of Madame Vyrubova's accident and imminent death, shivered involuntarily. He had the feeling that he was sitting beside a lifeless body. It seemed to him as if the Staretz's spirit, in some miraculous fashion, was communing with supernatural powers. Suddenly Rasputin twitched. Ignoring the Prince completely he brought his fist down upon his knee and shouted: "She lives! Drive faster, much faster!"

Brakes screeching, the car halted before the hospital. Rasputin raced up the stairs. With his heavy *mushik* hand he tore the door open and stumbled toward Madame Vyrubova's bedside. Czar and Czarina, taken unawares, were startled. The pale Staretz, his eyes gleaming, his hands spread wide, resembled a spectre. Rasputin's claw grasped the stricken woman's hand as in a vice. He bent over her, uttering no sound. Suddenly a convulsed twitching animated the bloodless face.

Timidly, affectionately, the Staretz caressed the twitching face. "Do you hear me, Annushka? Look at me, Annushka," he repeated softly, time and again.

Presently, as if obeying an inner urge, Madame Vyrubova raised her eyelids slowly. Her vacant glance met Rasputin's compelling gaze. It seemed as if the Staretz were leading the dying woman across an invisible bridge, back to life. The blood slowly returned to Madame Vyrubova's face.

"You are going to live, Annushka," Rasputin assured her, drawing out his vowels in the Siberian manner. "True, you will be a cripple. Nothing can be done about that. But you will live, Annushka. And now sleep, sleep!"

He released Madame Vyrubova's hand and staggered into the adjacent room. There, completely exhausted from his enormous exertion, Rasputin crumbled to the floor unconscious.

Czar and Czarina crossed each other, stirred to the very depths of their souls. In the sombre surrounding of a hospital room, they had been permitted to observe a genuine miracle! No doubt but that God Almighty was using this simple peasant from Siberia to dispense celestial blessings. . . .

Rasputin's prophecy proved correct. Madame Vyrubova's pains

subsided ; soon afterwards she was taken to her little house. And although she remained a cripple she could move about on crutches.

During the long months of convalescence, the Czarina often would sit at her friend's bedside, considering these visits a holy duty. Those hours were primarily filled with praise for the magic powers of the Staretz. Rasputin came to the little house with ever greater frequency, time and again meeting Alexandra Feodorovna at the bedside of the convalescing woman. During those months, under the pressure of military defeats, the secret power which Rasputin exerted over the Czarina in the past was forged anew into a force stronger than ever.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### THE MINISTER OF THE IMPERIAL SOUV

ONCE more Rasputin's power was in the ascendancy. His little apartment at 64 Gorochovaja Street overflowed with people. Rasputin received as many as four hundred visitors a day, among them ministers in office—and aspiring to office—seeking his assistance. Bankers sent him money or called personally, armed with valuable presents. Beautiful women grew ecstatic if Rasputin deigned to extend his gnarled hands toward them in a covetous gesture. *Mushiks*, from distant provinces, bowed deeply whilst submitting their simple needs to the Staretz, imploring his intercession for the peasantry at the throne of the Czar. Madame Vyrubova appeared in Rasputin's apartment almost daily; frequently, the Staretz's telephone would ring and a cultured voice from Czarskoje Selo would ask to speak to him.

In addition to these activities, Rasputin carried on a very lively correspondence, never tiring of composing those famous illiterate missives of such great value to the recipient, although often they were so awkwardly worded as to be practically unintelligible. Like a shrewd old sorcerer, Rasputin indited these letters—often mere slips of paper—according to the frame of mind of the person addressed. For the Czarina he would indulge in mystic symbolism; for the Czar he affected military optimism; calculated astuteness was Anna Vyrubova's share; categorical brevity for all others. But one and all considered these messages of inestimable value.

Thus, Rasputin, in his incoherent manner, would write to Alexandra Feodorovna: "Contemplations of Sermon on the Mount, valuable possession. What is Judea's fear as proved by deeds, mental entertainment. The reason of saints. One should not worry under the protection of Grace, but not out of fear and intimidation of our neighbours. Regretfully our friend departs for their consolation. Grigori."

To the Czar: "With all your might escape your heart. The protection of the Mother of God will assist you. The Invisible is helping your entire army, and with his holy omophorion covers the light of observation, illuminating all our eternal enemies. God is with us and one fears nobody. . . . Don't let sly technique scare you. God's grace is our stronghold. Your word will conquer them all. Your hand is the sword for all. Grigori."

To Madame Vyrubova: "Joyous and agreeable to talk to somebody. All are ready to serve their way upward. Pamphlets with all kinds of alumnies into the waste-basket. Grigori."

No less characteristic are the telegrams addressed to Rasputin:

"We remember, and are full of longing. Serious days. We thank, believe, and pray. Alexandra."

"Elation everywhere and we feel it, too. Have been at the capital. Our thanks. We console ourselves with your words. Nicholas."

And from the Czarina's letter to the Czar: "Here is a whole stack of supplications which our friend brought for you. The blessings and prayers of our friend will help you. It was a great consolation for me that you saw him, and that you will be blessed by him to-night."

Another time she wrote: "Anna informed our friend of the contents of your telegram. He blesses you and he was pleased to hear that you are happy. He is a little uneasy, however, because of the developments in the meat markets. The dealers are said to be willing to reduce the prices now. He thinks the best way would be for one of the ministers to call in a number of the largest wholesalers and explain to them the errors of their procedure. That ought to humiliate them."

On one occasion the Czarina warns: "It will be very bad for our country if your friend's wishes are not fulfilled. He knows what he is saying and he is always so earnest about everything."

In still another letter she informs the Czar: "I am sending you a cane which our friend received for you from Mount Athos! He used it for some time himself and now is presenting it to you with his blessings. It would be well if you could use it from time to time. At any rate, keep the cane close to the one M. Philippe touched!"

A note of caution is sounded in the message: "God will take His hand off Russia if its ruler permits the man whom He sent to us to be persecuted. . . . This Man of God is praying for you incessantly, and God certainly will not forgive us our weaknesses and our sins if we do not defend him."

Superstition holds sway in the Empress's admonition to Nicholas: "Remember to hold his comb in your hand prior to the meeting of the Ministers' Council and to comb your hair with it a few times. This will make you strong."

Just as fervently as the Czarina believed in the Staretz's occult powers, officials and ministers were firmly convinced of Rasputin's political omnipotence. The mere receipt of a slip of paper from him was sufficient to transport them into a state of joyous excitement. In exchange for his scrawled signature they fulfilled the many favours he asked for his supplicants in his abrupt, dictatorial manner.

Rasputin would write: "Beloved, dearest. Excuse. Help this poor bath attendant. Grigori." Or: "Beloved, dearest. Listen to him. Grigori." And another time: "He is one of yours. We talk piously enough, but it is with our sense that we must convince ourselves in all roots and branches. Grigori."

Rasputin's peasant mind was imbued with genuine compassion for "all that labour and are heavily laden." The repentance of a thieving army purveyor, or the glance of an attractive woman, would arouse his sympathy. Although he was ready to accept money and presents for his services, he never demanded anything nor counted the money that

was given him, but immediately distributed it among the poor. Moreover, he accorded as much attention to the plea of a little *mushik* as to the entreaties of a big banker.

On nights of carousal, surrounded by infatuated women and self-seeking officials, Rasputin would brag of his influence over the Czar: "Papa" and "Mama" were kissing his hands; "Papa" always called him "Christ"; the imperial daughters playfully wrestled with him; and "Mama" swore she would take his part, even if everybody else turned against him. In awe and admiration, the guests would fill, and everlastingly refill, Rasputin's glass. They stared aghast at this mighty man who officially held the lowly rank of a mere "palace lamp-lighter," but who, in drunken pride, referred to himself as "the Minister of the Imperial Soul."

Now and then, in the midst of bibulous revels, the Staretz would be overcome by ineffable grief over the insanity of the Great War. He once complained to a police sleuth: "My soul is very sad. In fact, I am so sad that I am growing deaf. For two hours I am all right, and then again, for five, I am ill." In reply to the query as to what caused him such sorrow, he sighed: "Ah, because, my son . . . because things are going badly in this country."

When Rasputin met the French Ambassador, M. Maurice Paléologue, at a reception given by an exalted lady, he unburdened his heavy heart to the diplomat. In jerky sentences, gazing about moodily, he confided to the Frenchman: "Too many dead, too many wounded, too many widowed, too many orphaned. Too many ruins, too many tears. Remember all the unfortunates who will never return. And each leaving five, six, ten people behind who weep for him. I know villages—big villages, too!—where everybody is in mourning. And those who return, what do they look like? Dear Lord! Crippled, with one arm, blind. For fully twenty years Holy Russia will harvest nothing but sorrow."

Rasputin's words and actions flashed through Petrograd like threatening bolts of lightning. Clerics, generals, politicians, and savants were stunned at the thought that the Czar, rejecting their co-operation openly, permitted himself to become a willing tool in the hands of this *mushik*. In hoarse whispers, rumours were speedily circulated that Rasputin was a paid spy of the Central Powers; that the Czarina—a German Princess!—confided in him military secrets which he promptly passed on to enemy agents. The word "treason" was ominously attaching itself to Rasputin.

Even those clerical and reactionary circles which had facilitated Rasputin's ascendancy now turned from him in abhorrence. Grand-duchess Anastasia and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sasanov openly spoke of Rasputin as "the Anti-Christ." The priest Illiodor wrote a pamphlet in which he called Rasputin "The Holy Devil." Even the very pride of conservatism, Deputy Purishkevitch, addressing the Duma, thundered against "dark powers invisibly at work."

Grey-haired popes and dignified savants whispered into one another's

ears stories of the sinful burden of heresy which this peasant was shouldering. His words were naught save enticements of the Evil One. In the *salons*, society gossiped that Rasputin had made proselytes of the entire imperial family and the Government for the ungodly sect of the Chlysti.

Shaking their heads, Petrograd society handed around a pamphlet, written by a well-known savant, Hofstädter, on the magical and secret brotherhood of the Chlysti. Smirks on their faces, deputies and Liberals would take special notice of the underscored sentences: "The real soul of Chlystism is a mysterious and mystical hypnosis. . . . Above all, the Chlysti sect and their rites must be definitely considered a systematically organized school of religious hysteria, not dangerous for people who are mentally well-balanced, but very much so for hysterically inclined women. Members of such religious circles make a stupefied impression. They walk around in a dazed state, like semi-automatons. Their living soul has been sucked dry by the vampire of mysticism. . . . The teachings of the Chlysti are dangerous not only because of intemperate excesses, but due to the sinister influence produced by their mystical enchantment. There is something about the control which a Chlysti staretz exerts upon mentally weak, half-hysterical people that, in its incomprehensibility, imperiousness, and destructiveness resembles diabolic inspiration."

From the drunken babbling and behaviour of Rasputin, inquisitive burghers became convinced of his adherence to the sinister sect of the Chlysti. Whenever Rasputin, in a fit of exultation, indulged in one of his wild dances, his guests—whether they were soberly criticizing him or completely under the spell of their profound faith in him—had to admit that a dark magician, with unlimited powers, was playing a demoniacal game at the very apex of the Empire.

Within the borders of Holy Russia, one man, unobtrusively, but none the less stubbornly, fought Rasputin's sway, and that man was Nicholas II. While the other members of the imperial family believed in Rasputin's boundless powers, the Czar knew that his own imperial omnipotence could effectively limit the Staretz's influence. For Nicholas II; Rasputin was merely the Byzantine stage-setting of his European empire. He felt that, through this unbridled native peasant, the Russian earth itself was enfolding him, and that the very essence of the Russian soul manifested itself in the *mushik's* gleaming eyes. While the Czarina was willing enough to regard the Staretz as a higher being, deserving of her worship, Nicholas never forgot, even for a moment, that he, as Czar, by the Grace of God, was ruler of all the people, holy men, and demons of his realm. Although the monarch permitted Rasputin to dry the tears of widows and orphans with his illiterate slips of paper, expressing a peasant's conception of justice, he fulfilled the Staretz's wishes concerning problems of state only if they coincided with his own imperial intentions. Whenever Rasputin's suggestions proved contrary to his own ideas, Nicholas, endowed with Byzantine cunning, knew how to escape the pressure of the Staretz.

He merely employed the same procedure which he had observed for two decades in his relations with his ministers and advisers. He resorted to this stratagem in 1915, when against Rasputin's will and that of the Czarina he appointed the Moscovite theologian, Samarin, administrator of the Holy Synod. The Czar simply left for General Headquarters and no impassioned pleas on the part of the Czarina, no dire warnings from Rasputin, could change his mind. "I am suffering excruciatingly," the Czarina wrote to her husband. "For fully twenty years we shared everything. Now important developments are taking place and I know neither your thoughts nor your plans. How this hurts me! . . . Oh, dearest, I am more than sad about Samarin, I am desperate. . . . Grigori, too, is desperate, and he beseeches me to look for someone more suitable than a member of that Moscow clique."

In answer to this letter, the Czar wrote: "How shall I thank you for your two lovely letters and the lilies you sent me? I thrust my nose deep into them and kiss them in the hope that I am touching the flowers your dear lips have touched. I keep them on my desk day and night."

The Czar knew how to enforce his imperial will against the *mushik*, especially when it came to personal questions. In the autumn of 1915 Rasputin went to Moscow to pray over the bones of Holy Hieromogen. In the evening he visited the restaurant "Jar," became intoxicated, and sought to make overtures to various women in the place. When one of the ladies repulsed him, the Staretz shouted in senseless fury: "Oh, I am not good enough for you? Let me tell you, I have had far better women than you. Look at the shirt I wear on my body. The Czarina herself embroidered it for me with her own hands. It seems I am good enough for the Czarina, but not for you! . . . Well, I'll show you!" And in drunken frenzy he tore off his clothes and—completely nude—began to dance to the chant of old songs of the Church. A flashlight picture was taken of this scene, the whole scandal spread on the police records, and eventually Minister Dshunkovsky reported the incident to the Czar.

The Czarina swore the pious Staretz had been impersonated by a double, and wrote to the Czar: "Dshunkovsky hates Grigori. . . . Summon Dshunkovsky and command him to destroy the police record and the picture. Warn him not to talk about Grigori, and tell him that if he continues to gossip about him he is acting like a traitor and not like a loyal subject." But it was Rasputin, and not Dshunkovsky, whom Nicholas summoned.

"Rasputin never forgot that audience," writes Pravdin in his work on the Russian Revolution. "Many months later, after he basked in imperial favour once more, the Staretz remarked, in wonderment, to Minister Beletzky: 'I never saw him that way.' It seems the Czar received Rasputin standing at his desk, one hand resting on top of it. Rasputin rushed to greet the monarch, but the Czar would not extend his hand. When Rasputin tried to embrace him, as was his wont, the Czar retreated a step. Suddenly the Staretz felt he had lost all his

importance and power. He stood before his ruler, a lowly, stupid *mushik*.

“‘What did you do in Moscow?’ the Czar asked him and gazed sternly into the light blue, unsteady eyes of the Staretz, darting hither and yon, like those of any ordinary, cowardly creature. The monarch’s glance measured the uncouth, robust figure of the peasant, the silk shirt embroidered by dear, beloved hands. Beholding this clumsy, unkempt lout and thinking of his Alix proved unbearable to Nicholas. He uttered just one word: ‘Out!’ The word was not spoken in a loud or even in an excited voice, but, afterwards, Rasputin never could recall how he had left the Czar’s study and how he had found his way through the lanes of the park to Madame Vyrubova’s little house.”

Some obscure feeling, however, prevented the Czar from cutting himself off from Rasputin completely. Because Rasputin was part of the imperial private life—especially that part which was attracting exaggerated attention—the Czar felt constrained to shield the Staretz. The more granddukes and dignitaries warned the Czar, the more imperial pride resisted them, because Nicholas II well knew the limits of Rasputin’s power. Moreover, in the monarch’s eyes, those of his subjects who criticized his private life were nothing but rebels against God and Czar.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### CZAR AND ARMY

**W**HILE Nicholas II drew upon all the experience of a twenty-year reign to maintain a balance of peace within his own family and within the country in general, the situation at the fronts assumed an ever graver aspect. True, the German advance on Paris had been halted by the Russian march on Königsberg. But in the Battle of Tannenberg the Imperial Guard had been wiped out. The same proud regiments of the Preobrazhensky and Semionovzky that, in 1905, had supported the throne against the revolutionaries, had been annihilated on the soil of East Prussia. Small wonder that, in the third year of the Great War, when the workers of Petrograd erected barricades in the capital, there were no loyal troops left to save the throne.

After initial successes the host of the Czar retreated from East Prussia and Galicia. No change of ministers, no law or ukase, could cope with the harrowing lack of ammunition and means of transportation. Sporadic unrest assailed different parts of the country. In Moscow the mobs plundered stores, stoned German-born grand-duchesses and demanded that Rasputin be hanged. And while the army needed 45,000 shells daily, only 13,000 were available. Even as Grandduke Nicholai Nicholaievitch, sorely beset by the advancing enemy, demanded that the territorials be called to the colours, Duma deputies clamoured for a responsible ministry.

The political clubs of the capital buzzed with rumours according to which the Czar—completely under the spell of Rasputin's magic—stood ready to violate his holy oath and conclude a separate peace. This gossip affected the Czar far more than the most terrible defeats of his armies. Innate Romanov obstinacy and piety rejected, with every fibre, the mere thought of besmirching the glory of a century-old name by a broken oath. Whenever anyone uttered the word "peace" in the Czar's presence, his face assumed a stern expression and he declared: "Peace means loss of honour and revolution. Who dares propose such things to me?"

In December, 1915, old Court Minister Frederiks, obviously excited, came to call on the Czar. He had just received a letter from his friend, Count Eulenburg, the then Master of Ceremonies of the German Kaiser. The letter, it appeared, contained an offer of peace. The Czar commanded Frederiks to read the letter to him. However, when the venerable courtier began to read in German, the Czar interrupted him: "Translate it into Russian. I no longer know German!" And when the disturbed Count came across a reference to the old

friendship between the Russian and German dynasties, the Czar snatched the letter from his hand and wrote on the margin : " This friendship is dead and buried."

Hecatombs of corpses covered the battlefields of Galicia and Poland. The march of the legions, about to be sacrificed on the altar of Moloch, was not unlike the spectral dance of the snowflakes outside the windows of the imperial palace. The white blanket descended upon the entire Russian realm like a celestial pall.

The enthusiasm that had imbued the Czar during the first months of the war had disappeared. Just as then he had yearned to take over the supreme command of his armies he now felt that to assume this leadership would constitute but one more sacrifice at the throne of God. However, as Job, his patron saint, had given up wife and children, so he, too, was prepared to sacrifice himself and his crown to the Eternal Judge in order to save his people.

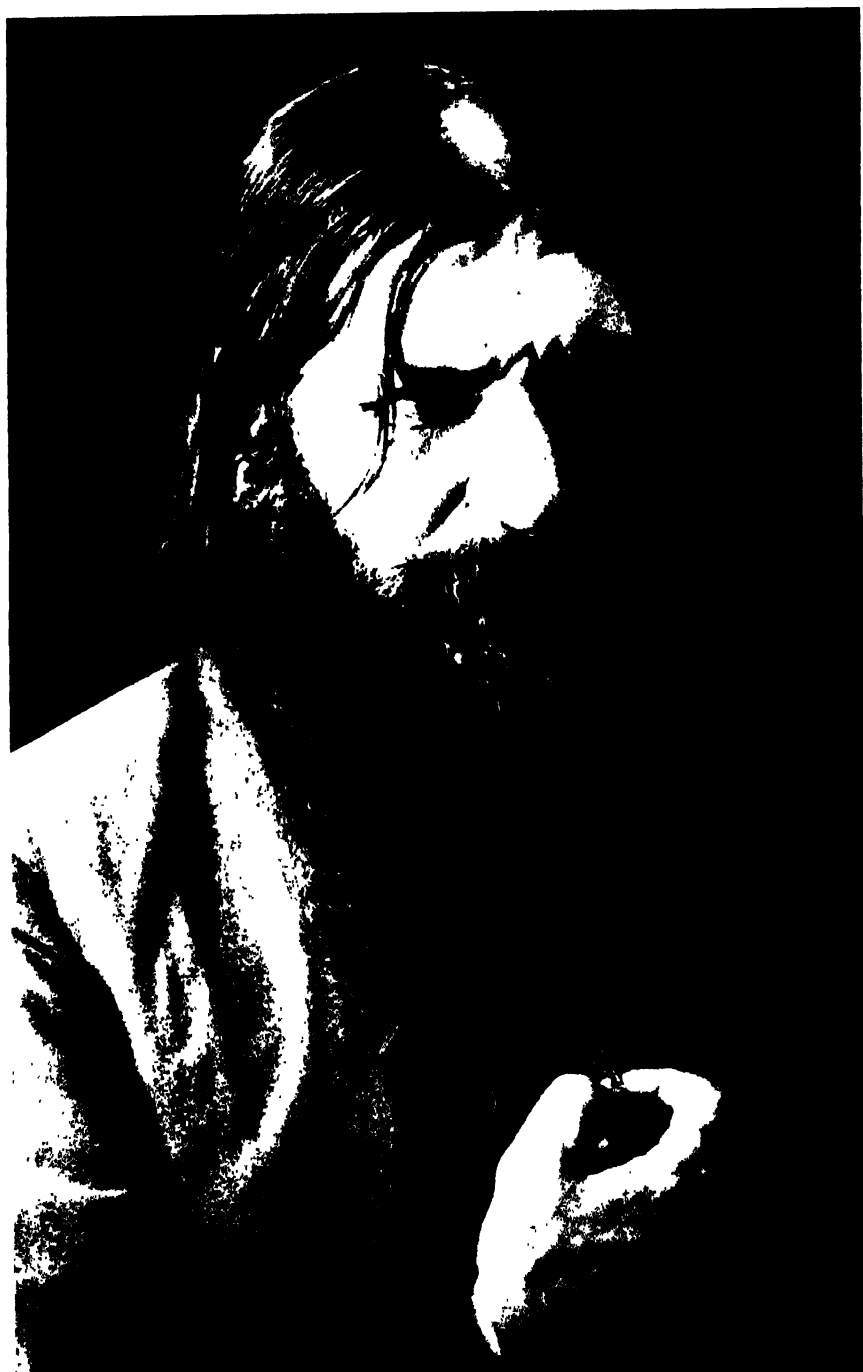
With Warsaw lost, the German armies taking possession of the Polish fortresses, and Austrian troops triumphantly re-entering Lemberg, the Czar said to his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sasanov : " Perhaps a redeeming sacrifice is necessary to save Russia. I myself shall be this sacrifice. God's will be done ! " He was very pale when he spoke these words, but his voice was calm and full of humility.

The Czar spent many hours before the holy icons in the subterranean crypt of Czarskoje Selo. At last his sacrificial mission was revealed to him in a dream-like vision : As the defeats of his armies were his own defeats, so the blessings of God, resting upon the crown of the Autocrat, would be the blessings of the army as well ! Czar and army must become one, thus throwing their combined strength onto the scale of celestial decision over victory or defeat.

When, after hours of meditation, the pale forehead of the Czar touched the cold marble floor of the chapel, he had resolved to assume the burden and responsibility of a Commander-in-Chief in this difficult hour.

Czarina and Rasputin immediately approved of the Czar's decision. For many months the Czarina had suspiciously watched the growing influence of the Generalissimo, Grandduke Nicholai Nicholaievitch. In interminable talks and long letters the Czarina had never tired of warning her consort against his mighty uncle. And Rasputin had been filled with savage hatred against his one-time protector ever since the Grandduke had peremptorily refused him permission to visit the fronts. Rasputin now saw in the man who once had befriended him a dangerous enemy who could easily drive him out of the peasant's paradise he had created for himself. The very thought of the Generalissimo's dismissal filled his vengeful heart with glee.

Among the members of the imperial house, however, the Czar's resolution to assume active command occasioned fear and bewilderment. Here was a little colonel, scarcely competent enough to command a regiment, who suddenly wanted to lead an army of ten million in complicated warfare. The Empress-Mother cried when she heard of



RASPUTIN, THE MONK WHO "RULED" RUSSIA



her son's decision, but neither her entreaties nor her warnings could induce the Czar to change his mind. Grandduke Alexander, too, sought to reason with his imperial cousin. The Czar suffered the long, lugubrious speech of the Grandduke and answered softly, as one preoccupied: "Everything is in the hands of God. Remember I was born on the 18th of May—the day of the patient sufferer Job. I am ready to accept my destiny."

When Rodsianko, President of the Duma, asked for an audience, the Czar received him with icy formality. "Your Majesty," Rodsianko advised unctuously, "you are the symbol and flag around whom the peoples of Russia rally. Therefore, Your Majesty must not permit even the slightest possibility of some shadow to fall upon this holy flag. Moreover, Your Majesty, the general situation will become even graver if the army is robbed of a leader who enjoys full confidence."

The Czar's eyes flashed as he retorted: "It seems, I fail to arouse similar confidence." So saying, he turned away.

Meanwhile the Ministers' Council was in session. The excitement among its members was truly terrific. Shaking their fists threateningly, they crowded around old Goremykin and demanded that either he submit the resignation of the entire Government to the Czar, or else that he find some ways and means to prevent a little colonel from assuming supreme command of the armies. Goremykin waved a tired hand. In a lifeless voice he tried to explain to the ministers that he was no revolutionary and that, to him, the will of the Czar was something holy. To his mind the ministers were bent upon emulating the Socialists, and if they insisted upon this course they simply would have to do without him. At any rate, the candles around his coffin had been lit for some time now. . . .

Incensed and shaken to the core, the majority of the ministers addressed a letter to the Czar. "Your Majesty," the memorial read, "once more we make so bold as to inform you that your decision is pregnant with dire possibilities, both in regard to yourself and your dynasty. . . . Under these circumstances, we are losing faith in the assumption that we can serve you and our country successfully."

In answer to this memorial, the Czar left Petrograd to assume supreme command over his gigantic army.

Surprisingly enough no sooner did the rays of the imperial crown shine upon General Headquarters, than the grace of the Almighty seemed to descend upon the sorely pressed army. The very day the Czar took over the supreme command, his army drove back the enemy at Tarnopol. The Russians even succeeded in preventing a dangerous German onslaught near Vilna. Doubtless God's blessing was upon the new Commander-in-Chief.

Surrounded by his army of ten million, the Czar decided to give the rebellious ministers his imperial answer. A telegram summoned them to General Headquarters at Mogilev. Wading through the mire, the ministers had to proceed on foot to the house of the governor where the Czar resided. They waited long until finally, not the pale, polite,

ever embarrassed little colonel appeared before them, but the wrathful heir of Peter the Great.

The Czar's words sounded like the thunder of cannon. "I really cannot understand how you could have the audacity to address such a letter to me. . . . I tore up your collective supplication for resignation. This certainly is no time for childish nonsense of this kind!"

When the ministers timidly spoke of prevailing public opinion the Czar shouted impatiently: "Gentlemen, you view all this much too seriously. It must be the result of the poisoned air of Petrograd. In fact, this subversive propaganda reaches as far as Czarskoje Selo, fully twenty-two versts away. And it is my belief, gentlemen, that the worst rumours do not originate in the workers' quarters, but in the very *salons* in which you move!"

Completely confounded the ministers left the room. Never before had the Czar addressed them in that fashion.

Through a small door, a slant-eyed old man with a wise and solemn face, gold spectacles, and polished manners, entered the Czar's study. He was General Alexeijev, Chief of the General Staff. His report had been interrupted by the appearance of the ministers. Now he and the Czar bent over maps, the General attempting to explain to the Colonel the intricate moves of the campaign. But Nicholas stared, wide-eyed, into distance. His pale lips moved imperceptibly and even the General beside him did not catch the whispered words: "Lord, everything, yea, everything be upon my head!"

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### THE SHOT AGAINST RUSSIA

**C**ONDITIONS in Petrograd grew worse from day to day. A veritable deluge of strikes submerged the whole of Russia. While the loyal regiments of the Guard spilled their life's blood on the battlefields, 170,000 reservists lingered in the barracks of Petrograd, playing cards, drinking, singing revolutionary songs and picking quarrels with the police.

When the Czar dismissed old Goremykin and made Protopopov Minister of Interior, the indignation of the Duma reached the boiling-point. In a stormy meeting, Miljukov made his famous address which culminated in the sentence : "What is all this—stupidity or betrayal ?" The majority party of the Duma, consisting of the progressive block, passed a resolution which read : "Treason is rife in the ranks of the Russian Government. This sentiment is rampant all over the country and because of it the Duma categorically declines to discuss laws proposed by the present Government."

Meanwhile the power of the Czarina and the influence of Rasputin increased immeasurably. In the absence of the Czar, Alexandra Feodorovna felt she alone embodied the authority of the realm. She received ministers, rendered advice as if it were a command, and conferred with Rasputin continually. Hitherto the Staretz's influence had been a factor only in the award of governmental purchase orders and in the grant of ecclesiastical dignities and pardons for prisoners ; now, however, Rasputin took it upon himself to recommend ministers, dismiss governors and assume, more and more, a dominant position in the political world.

The reports of the imperial *okhrana* during those days clearly reflected the unrest and chaos everywhere. "The sentiment in Petrograd," read one of the reports of this secret league for the protection of the Czar, "is of an extraordinary restless character. . . . Everybody seems to be awaiting some important development. Rebellions—even a palace revolt—are expected in all seriousness. In fact, it is said that preparations for the latter have already been made, and that the signal for its outbreak will be a terroristic act directed against a well-known staretz."

Another report read : "It is very probable that there will be unrest among the students in the near future ; that the workers will join in these demonstrations ; and that all these manifestations will culminate in an act of terror, directed against the Minister of Interior, since he is considered the man who is more to blame for the misfortunes of the country than anybody else. The most dangerous political speeches,

even daring to touch upon the sainted person of His Majesty, are heard everywhere."

Toward the end of 1916 these warnings were joined by the alarmed voices of the imperial family. "Dear Niki," Grandduke George wrote to the Czar, "if you do not form a new Government, responsible to the Duma, within the next two weeks, all of us are lost."

Even the mightiest in the house of Romanov, the recently dismissed Nicholai Nicholaievitch, deemed it necessary to inform the Czar of his disapproval, and wrote: "As long as the circumstances under which you chose your ministers were known only to a small circle, the state of affairs was tolerable. But now, when your methods have become publicly known to all strata of society, it appears impossible to rule Russia in this way any longer. You have repeatedly told me that you cannot believe anybody and that people lie to you. If this is so, your statement must also apply to Alexandra Feodorovna who loves you dearly, but because of nefarious, impenetrable deceit all about her is labouring under grievous misapprehensions. . . . If you are unable to keep undesirable influences from her you should at least free yourself of this incessant interference, and of suggestions which reach you by way of your beloved wife."

When the Czar did not even reply to the warnings of the granddukes, when he did not dismiss the ministers or threaten to dissolve the Duma; when rumours of treason on the part of Rasputin and the Czarina spread farther and farther, aristocratic Russia dispatched to the palace of the Czar an avenger who was to free the crown of Russian autocracy from the blot of peasant interference. The name of this avenger was Prince Felix Felixovitch Yussupov, Count Sumarokov Elston. Son-in-law of Grandduke Alexander and husband of a niece of the Czar, he was the wealthiest, handsomest, and most elegant among the nobles of the realm.

The young Prince looked upon Rasputin as the root of all evil. Together with his friend, Grandduke Demetrius, and Duma Deputy Purishkevitch, he evolved a plan to slay the Staretz.

With infinite cunning Yussupov set forth to win Rasputin's friendship. During long, rambling talks, he endeavoured to probe the soul of his enemy. Eventually, from all these conversations, Yussupov recognized the picture of a tremendous conspiracy, directed against Russia and centring around Rasputin. While the peasant spluttered alcoholic effusions, Yussupov incessantly pondered over his plan to rid the Empire of this monster. The Prince recognized in this unkempt *mushik* the most dangerous weapon in the hands of Russia's adversaries.

"Those people in the Duma will not go on talking much longer," Rasputin once confided to Yussupov. "I will simply chase the deputies away or I shall send them all to the front. . . . The Czar, oh, yes, he is a man of God! But what kind of ruler is he? He had better play with the children or give his attention to flowers or some such pastime. He should not rule an empire. Everything is so difficult for him. Well—God willing—we shall help him a little."

"Tell me, what is that medicine you give the Czar and the Czarevitch?" the Prince asked on another occasion.

"Different medicines, my dear friend, different ones," Rasputin answered. "To the Czar I dispense a tea, and this tea fills his whole body with celestial well-being. Oh, he feels so good, so fine! He forgets all his worries. You see, he has much on his conscience for which he ought to pray. The war alone, aye, his entire life would not be enough to gain him absolution."

The more Rasputin spoke, the stronger grew the Prince's antipathy. Assisted by fellow conspirators, Yussupov eventually succeeded in enticing the Staretz, by some subterfuge, to call on him at his palace one night. In a room in the basement, comfortably furnished, he played host to his victim.

The slaying of the Staretz has been described by the Prince himself. "I offered him a plate of poisoned cakes. 'I don't want any,' he said, 'they are too sweet.' Presently, however, he took one, and then another. I was aghast as I watched him bolt them down, one after another. The potassium cyanide should have shown results immediately. But, to my unbounded amazement, Rasputin continued the conversation as if nothing had happened. . . .

"Then I gave him some Madeira wine, containing the poison, and watched his every movement in the expectation that it would be all over immediately. He drank it in little gulps. His face did not change. Only now and then he brought his hand to his throat as if it were hard for him to swallow. In answer to my question whether he felt ill, he answered: 'Oh, it's nothing, just a slight tickling in the throat.' A few agonizing moments passed. 'Good Madeira, fill up once more,' Rasputin bade me, and handed his glass over. . . .

"We sat opposite one another and drank silently. There was a cunning look in his eyes as if he meant to say: 'See, no matter how hard you try, you cannot do anything to me.' Suddenly his facial expression changed completely, sheer hatred replacing the sly smile on his face. Never before had he looked so fear-inspiring. He regarded me with the eyes of a devil. At that moment I detested him beyond endurance and wanted to jump at his throat and strangle him. The room was ominously quiet. An invisible battle was being fought between us. I grew dizzy. It was terrible. . . .

" 'Sing something gay for me,' he asked. 'I like to listen to your singing.' I took the guitar and sang. 'Sing some more. I love to listen. You sing with so much soul,' asserted Rasputin.

"Suddenly an idea flashed through my brain. Crying: 'Grigori Efimovitch, look upon this cross and pray!' I shot him. Rasputin roared in a deep, bestial voice, then crashed to the bearskin that covered the floor. He lay on his back, his face twitching, his eyes closed. After a few minutes he was inert. I examined the wound. The bullet had pierced the heart region. He must be dead!

" . . . We went to my study and discussed the future of our country, now for ever liberated from an evil spirit. Suddenly, while we were

talking, an uncanny restlessness came over me. I felt the urge to go downstairs, into the dining-room where Rasputin's body lay. It was motionless as I bent over and felt the pulse. The heart was still, but suddenly the left eyelid began to flicker and the face twitched convulsively. He opened his left eye, and then the right. Rasputin's both eyes were upon me, exuding diabolical hatred. I was startled and mute with horror. Then something monstrous happened. With a powerful jerk, Rasputin leapt to his feet. Foam issued from his mouth. It was horrible ! The room resounded with his wild roaring. I saw him reach out for me with his claw-like fingers. They caught hold of my shoulders like red-hot vices. His unsteady gaze fastened upon me. In a hoarse whisper he repeated my name over and over. . . .

"Something in that poisoned, bullet-drilled body had been resurrected by the strength of evil powers to avenge him. It was so terrible that even now I can think of it only with inexpressible horror. I tore myself loose from his grasp with an enormous effort. Rasputin fell on his back, gasping. I looked at him. He lay in an inert heap. Suddenly he moved again. I rushed out of the room. 'Quick, quick, a revolver. Shoot him. He is still alive !' I shouted. . . .

" . . . Rasputin, on all fours, gasping and howling like a wounded animal, dragged himself upstairs. He bounded forward in a last leap, and reached the secret door leading to the courtyard. . . . Purishkevitch rushed after him. In quick succession, two shots sounded, then a third and fourth. I saw Rasputin stagger and fall in the snow. . . . There was no sign of life any longer. A gaping wound showed on his left temple, inflicted, as I was told later, by Purishkevitch's boot.

"Blood gushed from Rasputin's many wounds. His face was disfigured. I wanted to close my eyes and run away so as to forget the horrible sight at least for a moment. And yet something inexplicable drew me towards the bleeding body with such strength that I could not resist it. I felt as if my head were bursting. Madness possessed me. I jumped upon the body in savage fury, flailing it with a rubber truncheon, heedless of where I struck. All divine and human rights had disappeared in that moment. In vain the others sought to hold me back. When at last they succeeded, I lost consciousness."

At dawn the murderers took the Staretz to the Neva in the carriage of Grandduke Demetrius and lowered him through a hole in the ice. When the police recovered the body a few days later, the autopsy furnished evidence that Rasputin had been still alive when dropped into the icy floods of the Neva.

Old experienced courtiers, upon advising the Czar of the Staretz's death, observed an odd twitching around the corners of his mouth which he sought to hide by stroking his moustache. They wondered if, possibly, he felt relief at the news.

At first, when an aide-de-camp had brought the Czar the Czarina's telegram, informing him of Rasputin's violent death, the Emperor's face had assumed a bored expression. Only after perusal of a long

letter from the Czarina, setting forth the details of the revolting murder, did the Czar display deep disgust. On the spur of the moment he commanded preparations to be made for his return to Petrograd. At the same time he telegraphed to the Czarina: "Read your letter only now. It left me horror-stricken. I am with you in my prayers and thoughts. Shall arrive to-morrow at six. Kisses. Niki."

The Czar instructed the Minister of Interior: "I herewith order that all newspaper articles dealing with Rasputin's murder be prohibited immediately. Pass on my order to Adjutant-General Ruský or General Chabálov for immediate attention."

Alighting from his train at Czarskoje Selo, the Czar remarked to courtiers awaiting him: "I am ashamed before the whole of Russia that people related to me have stained their fingers with the blood of this peasant."

When the slaying of Rasputin became known in Petrograd the whole city was jubilant. People embraced one another in the streets and happy faces were seen everywhere. The Staretz's murderers were hailed as national heroes. The nightmare which had oppressed Russia seemed to be lifted for ever.

However, the shot fired by Prince Yussupov struck not only the poisoned, dying peasant, but the imperial family, the throne, and the heavy gold of the Romanov crown as well. The shot in the cellar of the Yussupov palace destroyed, too, the magical mysticism that enveloped the Czar. In the searchlight of merciless publicity directed upon the imperial palace, the country beheld an hysterical woman, an ailing boy, and a timid, harassed little colonel. Liberal world sentiment held that, having been shorn of their purple and exposed to the blinding glare of public opinion, Czar and Czarina would have to renounce autocratic forms of government and entrust their power to men who enjoyed the nation's confidence.

But nothing of the sort happened. The palace remained shrouded in sombre silence. Czar and Czarina secluded themselves from the world and nobody could gain their ear. At the same time, like flashes of a mighty thunderstorm, the Emperor's fury descended upon the culprits. In the spectral reflections of these bolts of lightning the burghers of Petrograd observed that, in accordance with the Czar's command, the much-acclaimed murderers of Rasputin were sent into exile. Moreover, Protopopov, a friend of the Staretz, was given extraordinary power, and the session of the Duma was abruptly postponed. Surprised by this outbreak of imperial wrath, the people of Petrograd told each other, in awestruck whispers, that crazy Protopopov was to assume Rasputin's place. Gossip had it that in a gesture of pious ecstacy, he had sunk to his knees before the imperial couple and, crossing himself, had shouted: "It is not before you . . . not before you! I am bending my knee before Christ whom I see standing between you!"

Fear, almost amounting to panic, assailed the granddukes, the politicians, and the ambassadors of allied countries. Revolution seemed unavoidable. But imperturbable as always, drifting along with his

customary equanimity, the Czar refused to take the one step which might ward off threatening catastrophe.

During the last few months of the Empire three distinct warnings reached Nicholas II. The first came from Sir George Buchanan, Ambassador of Great Britain, an old confidant of the Liberal factions of the Duma. When Sir George came to wait on the Czar, the Emperor instinctively felt that the Englishman was not acting as a representative of King George V, but rather as a delegate of Petrograd Liberals. With studied coolness and formality the Czar received the British statesman in his official *salon* instead of in his informal study. Standing in the centre of the room and neglecting to offer his visitor a chair, Nicholas listened silently while the ambassador of His Britannic Majesty discoursed upon the mistakes of the imperial Government with cold objectivity.

"Your Majesty," Sir George told the Czar, "need only lift a finger and your people will fall to their knees before you. It will be so easy for Your Majesty to tear down the wall between you and your people and to regain their confidence."

The Czar stiffened. When he spoke, his voice assumed a note of icy hauteur and each word sounded like the sharp blow of a hammer: "Is it your opinion, then, that I must win the confidence of my people . . . or that my people must regain my confidence?"

The Ambassador of His Britannic Majesty uttered not a single syllable. The shiny parquet floor between him and the Czar suddenly seemed transformed into a yawning abyss across which the voice of century-old autocracy reached him like the thunder of approaching doom.

A few days later the Czar received Rodsianko. In a long report, the President of the Duma elucidated the reasons which made a dismissal of Rasputinian ministers inevitable. After listening to the report, the Czar asked: "I take it, then, that you all demand Protopopov's dismissal?"

"Exactly, Your Majesty. Before, I implored you to do this. Now, I demand it."

"What is that, please?"

"Your Majesty," Rodsianko's voice sounded solemn, "save yourself. We stand on the brink of tremendous events. What Your Majesty and the Government are doing now is enraging the people to such an extent that anything might happen. Why, every scoundrel is issuing orders! Your Majesty, you have listened to my advice before."

"When have I ever done that, if you please?" inquired the Czar scornfully.

"In 1915, when you dismissed Maklakov."

"Then, I deeply regret it. After all, Maklakov had not lost his senses."

"Naturally not, Your Majesty, since he had none to lose!"

Suddenly the Czar laughed aloud, and to Rodsianko it sounded grim rather than gay. "Your Majesty," he shouted, distraught, "something

must be done ! Do you want to bring about a revolution in the midst of a war ? ”

“ I am doing,” came the monarch’s reply in frozen accents, “ what God commands me to do.”

Rodsianko bowed. “ I leave Your Majesty in the firm conviction that this is my last audience with you. Hardly three weeks will pass and the revolution will have swept you away. You will be Czar no longer. You shall harvest what you sowed ! ”

As the last words were uttered, the Czar arose from his chair, gazed at Rodsianko sadly, and whispered softly, as if to himself : “ God’s will be done ! ”

Once more, for the very last time, a voice of warning reached the Czar’s palace. Grandduke Alexander, oldest friend of the imperial family, called upon Czar and Czarina. As Alexandra Feodorovna was indisposed, he was received in her suite. The Grandduke bent over the ailing woman and addressed her quietly but none the less urgently. “ For twenty-four years I have been your loyal friend, Alix, and I still am. It is with a friend’s prerogatives that I am trying to make you understand the hostility of all strata of the population to your policies. You have a family. Why do you not dedicate your time to them, and leave the business of state to your husband ? ”

The Czarina flushed and glanced at the Czar. Nicholas smoked on, in silence. The Grandduke resumed his argument when suddenly the Czarina interrupted him : “ What you say is ridiculous. Niki is an autocrat ! How could he ever share his God-given rights with anybody else ? ”

“ You are mistaken, Alix,” Alexander replied. “ The Czar ceased to be an autocrat on the 30th of October, 1905. That was the time to remember those God-given rights ! ”

The longer the Grandduke spoke the more marked became the expression of contempt on the pale, still beautiful face of the Czarina. Sensing the futility of his mission, a great fury, born of desperation, came over Alexander. He jumped up and his mighty voice veritably shook the walls of the palace as he shouted : “ I kept my silence for thirty months, but now I see that you two are resolved to go down to destruction ! Still, you have not the right to take the rest of us with you ! ”

“ I refuse to continue this conversation,” the Czarina interposed haughtily, whereupon the Grandduke departed in disgust.

All three warnings had been in vain. Ominous silence reigned in Czarskoje Selo once again. The Czar prepared to return to the front. In anguish the Empress strode up and down the lanes of the park alone.

There was a little mound in a corner of a remote meadow : the Staretz’s grave. The Czarina passed many hours there, kneeling in prayer. On the day the Staretz had been buried, she had put a crucifix and a letter into his stiff hands. The letter read : “ My dearest martyr, Give me your blessings so that they may be with me on the thorny

path I must still tread down here on earth. Remember us in your holy prayers. Alexandra."

Her eyes brimming with tears, Alexandra Feodorovna stared at the snow-covered mound. From dim distance, out of the fog and the clouded sky, a sombre message seemed to reach her. Like the dying echo of a macabre melody, the last, dire warning of the Staretz rang in her ear : " If we ever should be separated, you will lose your son and your crown within half a year."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### THE REVOLT OF THE GRANDDUKES

THE reign of the Romanovs was drawing towards its end. Everybody felt it—nobody more distinctly than the Romanovs themselves. Staretz Rasputin's curse weighed heavily upon the dynasty. Even heavier weighed the conviction that the Czar, under the spell of his destiny, was plunging headlong into an abyss. A few more steps, a few more somnambulant gestures, and the yawning, bottomless pit would not only swallow Czar and Czarina, but the entire house of Romanov as well.

Surrounded by a uniformed host of ten millions, the pale Czar resided at General Headquarters. His arms clasped about the frail body of the ailing Czarevitch—at Mogilev on one of his periodical visits—the Emperor stared into the endlessness of icy Nordic nights. Enigmatical stillness enveloped the monarch amidst ten million armed *mushiks*; taciturn, with dull faces, gnarled hands, tired eyes, and scrubby beards, they diffused the scent of the Russian soil. Nicholas was aware of this effluvium, sensing in it ten million threads, each single one of which bound him to a single *mushik*. He clearly felt that the war, in all its awesomeness, was to be the acid test of his power.

The Czar spent many days and nights in his private chapel. The ruler of the immeasurable realm kneeled before the stern countenance of St. Nicholas, the Wonder Worker. Clouds of incense hovered about the Byzantine crosses as the Czar's lips fervently formed one word : " Victory ! "

Back in Petrograd, in the palaces of the granddukes, in the *salons* of politically-minded ladies, and in the corridors of the Duma, a whispered word was repeated again and again. It was an expression of desperation, yet it had an undertone of jubilation. The word, sounding like an echo to the Czar's fervent prayer, was : " Insanity ! "

To be sure, the whispers were so soft as to be scarcely audible. The Czar was still surrounded by an atmosphere of omnipotence. Even the granddukes—the most privileged class in the country—who had much to lose and who were safe only as long as the throne remained unshaken, still appeared transfixed by czarist omnipotence. Disgruntled, revolt in their hearts, the granddukes nevertheless stood stiffly at attention, clicked their heels, and assured the Czar : " At your service, Your Majesty ! " However, as soon as they thought themselves unobserved they would shake their heads, shrug their shoulders and mutter : " Insanity, stupidity, treason ! "

In the entire dynasty there was only one person who did not indulge in all this heel-clicking and did not accept the position of a subject ;

one person who had sufficient power and authority to engineer a palace revolution: That staunch and inflexible old woman, the Empress-Mother, Maria Feodorovna.

Nothing was farther from Empress Maria's mind than to enter into an alliance with the Liberal elements. She detested the Duma just as she detested politically inclined ladies and revolutionaries; just as she disapproved, too, of the exaggerated air of mysticism adopted by Their Majesties and their Court. But, as the Dowager-Empress she could, if she wished, instigate a successful rebellion within the family circle. Again and again the glances of anxious granddukes and worried Conservatives focused, hopefully, on the palace of Maria Feodorovna, but to no avail. The Empress-Mother saw and knew everything. Although she clearly perceived the pitfall for which the Czar was headed, she would not step forward and give the word which would usher in rebellion.

Empress Maria wanted the war to continue and she knew that a change of rulers—no matter how auspicious—would inevitably lead to a separate peace. The mere thought of it was more than she could bear! She and her son shared one hope in common: To win the war. This fervent desire for victory served as a bridge between mother and son.

A Danish princess by birth, the Empress-Mother was filled with unmitigated hatred against the Hohenzollerns who had humiliated her native country in 1864. To make matters worse, on the day war had been declared she had been sojourning in Germany. The people in the streets of Berlin had pelted her carriage with stones and had heaped curses and insults upon her. An anointed Czarina of Danish birth, she could never forgive these insults. "Anything is better than the triumph of the Germans," Empress Maria thought. Therefore, she pretended not to understand the expectant, at times almost threatening, glances of her friends. "We must fight until we are victorious," she declared with her usual frigidity.

The granddukes, frantic with fear over the fate of the dynasty, incessantly sought a way out of the dilemma. They knew that—somehow or other—the depressing spirit of defeatism had to be surmounted. Would it, therefore, not be advisable for the granddukes to take matters in hand rather than leave the initiative to the Liberal intelligentsia? As affairs grew steadily graver, members of the ruling house came to agree upon the efficacy of such a procedure. It was precisely this train of thought which had prompted Grandduke Demetrius, Prince Yussupov, and Deputy Purishkevitch to lay a trap for Rasputin.

The most important representative of the Romanovs, Nicholas Nicholaievitch, was far from Petrograd. He ruled as Stadtholder in the Caucasus ever since the Czar had relieved him of the supreme command. Gigantic of stature, endowed with a bellowing voice, and enjoying a reputation of superb horsemanship, he had speedily won the hearts of the Caucasians. In elegant cafés in Tiflis, as well as in wild

mountain gorges, the natives spoke of him enthusiastically, inventing romantic legends that attested to his great courage, his physical strength, and his noble spirit.

The Grandduke resided in the Stadtholder Palace on Golovinsky Street in Tiflis. A vast park protected the large mansion against the noises of the city. Through the artistic, wrought-iron gates, crowned with the double-headed eagle, the curious caught fleeting glimpses of tall Nicholai during his daily walks. As he strode past long rows of pine trees, he reminded one of a mighty, untamed beast. Everybody in Tiflis—just as everybody throughout the Empire—guessed that the Grandduke, as he dallied in the seclusion of the park, contemplated how well the imperial gold crown would rest upon his own iron-grey head.

The burgomaster of Tiflis shared the general opinion that revolution was inescapable. As soon as Rasputin had been murdered and the entire Liberal populace began to discuss the mode and manner of the approaching revolution, the burgomaster, too, decided he would have to take a hand in world-political questions. Speedily, he repaired to Petrograd to submit to his Liberal friends a proposition which won their whole-hearted approval. An expression of epochal importance was on the burgomaster's face when, returning to Tiflis, he immediately sought an audience with the Grandduke.

Nicholai Nicholaievitch met him in the privacy of his park. The burgomaster bowed deeply: "Imperial Highness," he ventured, obviously imbued with the feeling that, at that moment, he was boldly stepping into history. "Your Imperial Highness," he reiterated, then continued bravely: "With ever-increasing emphasis, voices in the capital city and, indeed, throughout the Empire, maintain that the present state of government is intolerable. Holy Russia stands at the brink of disaster. His Majesty, the Czar, and especially Her Majesty, the Czarina, refuse to heed all warnings. Important circles in Petrograd have come to the conclusion that only Your Imperial Highness can save the situation. Your Imperial Highness, Russia needs you! Your regency—better still, your reign—would gain victory for Russia. Meanwhile Their Majesties could await the end of the war in Livadia Castle."

Nicholai Nicholaievitch said not one word. Nothing stirred in his face. He glanced into the distance, seemingly preoccupied. The burgomaster grew uneasy with the passing moments. He perspired and gasped. The epochal expression vanished from his face. The Grandduke's silence seemed interminable.

Tall Nicholai's gaze clung to the double-headed eagle, the towering trees, and the narrow pebble-strewn lane before him. But what his mental eyes really beheld was the Governor's residence in Mogilev which housed the General Headquarters. On the wall there, right over the big table, hung a calendar, and that calendar showed the date to be the 23rd of August, 1915. He himself—H.I.H. Grandduke Nicholai Nicholaievitch—was sitting at the table, Commander-in-

Chief over an army of ten million. Opposite him stood Minister of War Polivanov.

The Minister had arrived at General Headquarters with a special message from the Czar. "Your Imperial Highness," Polivanov had said, "I have been entrusted with a very difficult task. His Majesty has resolved to take over the supreme command in this desperate hour. At the same time His Majesty has appointed Your Imperial Highness Stadtholder in the Caucasus and Commander on the Turkish front."

Minister Polivanov, terrified, lapsed into silence. What would the Grandduke do? Would he shoot him in a sudden outburst of temper? Would he dethrone the Czar, himself assuming supreme power in the realm? Such an act would not be at all impossible in view of the fact that the Grandduke was still master over ten million *mushiks*.

The Minister's apprehensions, however, had been for naught because the Grandduke smiled ingratiatingly, flexed his long limbs and murmured: "So, so, at the Caucasian front. I like the idea. I shall make short shrift of the Turks. And when may I expect His Majesty to arrive here?"

The Grandduke had been in the best of humour all day. He had joked with the officers of his staff, smilingly issued his last orders, and commanded his orderly to lay out, for the morrow, his gala uniform with all his decorations.

Utterly shaken, the grandducal staff had watched this splendid display of Romanov poise. But alone in his bedroom, late that night, tall Nicholai snatched his cap from its hook and tore it to shreds with his mighty hands. What pained the Grandduke was not his dismissal, but the reason behind it: One year ago Nicholai Nicholaievitch had received a telegram from Petrograd advising him of Rasputin's intention to visit the front and bless the Grandduke's troops. The Grandduke's answer had been curt enough: "Just let that scoundrel Grigori come here and I shall hang him on the first handy tree."

Rasputin never forgave that reply. From that moment on the Staretz had slunk through the imperial palace, incessantly dinning into the Czar's ears: "Nicholashka wants to be King of Galicia and Poland. Perhaps he will want to be czar some day. Beware!" The peasant's words had impressed the Emperor more than all the pledges of loyalty from the Grandduke; it was just this fact that had hurt Nicholai far more than his transfer to the Caucasus.

The day after Minister of War Polivanov had informed the Grandduke of the Czar's decision to assume supreme command, the Grandduke, in full regalia, received his nephew at the railway station. He saluted the Czar smartly, laughed loudly, and asked in the friendliest fashion: "Well, when do you want me to leave here?"

"Why, you can stay a few days longer," the Czar replied smilingly. Apparently he was vastly relieved to find his gigantic uncle in such an amiable mood.

The Grandduke remained two more days. He gave a big dinner, solemnly handed over his office, and received all generals in a farewell

audience. On the day of departure the Czar and his entourage surrounded the broadly smiling Grandduke on the platform. Just before boarding his special train, Nikolai Nicholaievitch whispered into the Czar's ear : " There are a few things I want to tell you, Niki. Come into the coach with me."

Czar and Grandduke boarded the train. As soon as they were inside the private compartment, Nikolai Nicholaievitch carefully closed the door. The Czar stood with his back against the window. He was silent, his eyes avoiding his uncle who now stretched himself to his full height. Looking down upon this mite of a nephew, he roared with all the strength of his lungs : " And you thought I was after your crown ? You really believed that ? "

The windows—the entire coach itself—seemed to rattle. The Czar kept silent and glanced aside. Nikolai Nicholaievitch crashed his gigantic fist upon the table with the force of a sledgehammer. " Tell me with what right you believed that lie ? How could you dare believe in a peasant more than in a grandduke ? "

The Czar still uttered no word but looked up at his gigantic uncle apprehensively. The generals, standing outside on the platform, were so embarrassed that they did not know what to do. The Grandduke stalked out of the compartment without another word and the Czar speedily alighted from the coach. Presently the train got under way, with the departing Grandduke on the step of his special car respectfully saluting his anointed nephew. . . .

Nicholai Nicholaievitch recalled these incidents while the burgomaster of Tiflis stood before him, gasping and perspiring, still awaiting the grandducual answer. Those words the Grandduke had shouted at the Emperor, on that day of departure, weighed heavier upon him now than the holiest oath of fealty. He thoroughly despised his nephew. During sleepless nights he racked his brain to find a method to humiliate him, showing him how stupid and small he had been to believe in a lowly *mushik's* words. And to prove as much to the Czar, the Grandduke—regardless of how wrong it might be—now had to refuse the crown. If he accepted it, neither the frail Czar nor that despicable Staretz, but he himself, would be the loser ! The great revenge he had been planning imposed a great renunciation. . . .

The shadows in the park at Tiflis lengthened. Nikolai glanced at the burgomaster. That Liberal man had no interest in grandducual conceptions of honour, nor could he fully comprehend what obligations Romanov blood imposed. Nikolai Nicholaievitch therefore said : " I understand the patriotism that actuates you. I myself have repeatedly warned His Majesty to beware of destructive influences. I cannot do more. The hand of a grandduke cannot be raised against the anointed monarch." So saying, Nikolai Nicholaievitch wheeled about and strode into the house, leaving the embarrassed burgomaster to find his way out as best he could.

While Nikolai Nicholaievitch continued to saunter along the pebble-strewn lanes of the Stadtholder's park in Tiflis, wintry snows enveloped

Petrograd. The frost formed fantastic designs on the tightly shut windows of the palaces, facing the Neva River and the Moika Canal. Now and then a motor-car bearing the Romanov escutcheon would drive up to one or another of the grandducal residences. Then a frost-bitten soldier would stumble from his guard-house, salute stiffly and, his breath changing into vapour as he spoke, the man would greet the Grandduke in the prescribed manner: "Good health to Your Imperial Highness!"

Behind the closed windows of grandducal palaces, members of the House of Romanov assembled. Nobody knew what went on there. However, rumours in the corridors of the Duma, among the Liberal intelligentsia, in *salons* and clubs persisted that four members of the imperial family, at the head of four regiments of the Guard, were planning to surround Czarskoje Selo, arrest the Czarina, and take her south to the Crimea.

Even the names of the granddukes were mentioned, three among them being the brothers Cyril, Boris, and Andrew Vladimirovitch. The "Vladimirovitchi," as they usually were called, made no attempt to hide the fact that they thoroughly disapproved of the Czar's policy. However, they would not breathe a word about the rumoured conspiracy. The Vladimirovitchi did not talk. They had a German mother—a princess of Mecklenburg—who had trained them in discretion as well as discipline.

The curious intelligentsia therefore decided to approach the fourth member mentioned in connection with the grandducal plot. An occasion presently offered itself when one of the youngest members of the imperial house arranged a large dinner party in the apartment of his dancer-paramour. With Duma deputies, influential bankers, and prominent members of the Liberal world surrounding him, the youthful Romanov felt as if he were the foremost factor in Russian politics. The bankers imbibed freely of champagne, the deputies indulged in revolutionary speeches, and one and all regarded the young Grandduke more than a little expectantly. The youth never affirmed or denied anything, but the glamour of the evening veritably blinded him. There they sat, the most prominent men in Russia, encouraging him with their glances! And towards morning the guests actually heard what they had come for: in the presence of all the bankers and deputies, a member of the imperial family openly agreed with them that, indeed, things could not go on like this any longer!

Later that day, Liberal revolutionaries appeared in their bureaus, clubs, and *salons* with thoughtfully furrowed brows. Each one of them was bent upon interpreting the secret, hidden meaning of every gesture, smile, or frown of the young Grandduke. After indulging in speculations all day long, the intelligentsia finally became convinced that they had discovered the hidden meaning behind the young Grandduke's significant hints: none other than Grandduke Cyril Vladimirovitch had determined to arrest the imperial family and give Holy Russia a constitutional government!



J.V.L.

PRINCE YUSSUPOV, WHO ENDED RASPUTIN'S CAREER



Those members of the intelligentsia who prided themselves on being well acquainted with Court chronicles knew precisely why Grandduke Cyril would assume the role of a Russian Louis Philippe *égalité*. Commander of the Guard Corps, admiral and third grandduke of the realm in line of seniority, Cyril had married against the Czarina's wish in 1905, when he led to the altar the Duchess Victoria Melitta of Coburg, divorced wife of the Czarina's favourite brother. In order to obtain the Czar's consent to his marriage the Grandduke had volunteered in the Russo-Japanese War. He had been wounded, and thus became the only grandduke who actually had shed his blood for Czar and realm. Nevertheless, no sooner had he married the beautiful Duchess than he was pursued by the Czarina's unmitigated wrath. Forced to leave army and navy, he lost his right to wear uniform and epaulets, was deprived of appanage and titles, and, finally, was even banished from Russia altogether.

Such harsh treatment of a wounded grandduke, whose sole sin was that he had fallen in love, had created widespread ill-feeling at the time. To be sure, a few years before the outbreak of the Great War the punishment meted out to the Grandduke had been rescinded. However, Liberal revolutionaries still assumed that the Vladimirovitchian had not forgotten the shame once imposed on them, and now harboured against the imperial Court the same feelings which once imbued the House of Orléans against the House of Bourbon. Apparently the hour for the Russian Orléans had struck!

A tremble with excitement, the Liberals of Petrograd watched grandducual motor-cars draw up before the mansion of Grandduchess Maria Pavlovna. More and more frequently the Romanovs congregated in the wide halls of that Neva palace, reminding one another, in whispers, that for fully three hundred years the House of Romanov had ruled over the immense domain, and now this rule was jeopardized! Through the frost-embroidered windows of the palace the granddukes beheld the Neva metropolis in a mantle of snow. The city appeared ominous, gloomy, full of smouldering dangers. The granddukes realized what the capital city expected of them: a troop of Hussars of the Guard, and a fast gallop to Czarskoje Selo, ending in the regency of some of the granddukes.

Among the Romanovs assembled in Maria Pavlovna's palace was Michael, the Czar's brother, who studiously kept to himself. Although he ranked next to the Czarevitch in succession to the throne, now that a possible coup was discussed something forbade him to speak up. He held his peace when the question was aired as to which of the Guard units would be available.

The whole plan weighed on the souls of the granddukes like a nightmare. They still were ingrained with a feeling of profound awe for the Anointed One. The hand of a grandduke would become paralysed at the mere thought of being raised against the Czar.

"But if we don't do it, someone else will," one of them pointed out gloomily, "and that will mean the end of the rule of the Romanovs."

When day broke, the granddukes had arrived at an agreement. Once more they would throw the full weight of their names and titles into the scale of imperial decision. It was not difficult to find an excuse for such a procedure. The banishment of Demetrius and Felix, two members of the ruling house, would suffice. Maria Pavlovna provided a white sheet of paper and the granddukes indited their letter. It was a plea for mercy for Demetrius and Felix as well as a warning against irresponsible rule. This strange document was signed by all the Romanovs who were present.

The Czar's hand trembled as he read the document ; his cigarette fell from his hand, unnoticed ; he leaned against the wall, feeling the need of support. It indeed was fortunate that he was alone ! Right before him, black on white, the shame of his family was spread. The granddukes actually pleaded for the murderers of Rasputin !

"They would not have dared to do that in my father's lifetime," thought the Czar, recalling the gigantic figure of Alexander III, his stern mien, and his thundering voice. In his father's time, granddukes had been banished for the smallest infractions. A love affair, a visit to a house of ill repute had been sufficient to bring down upon their heads the wrath of Alexander III. "I have always treated them far too leniently," Nicholas reflected wearily. His hand reached for a pen. In large letters he wrote on the margin of the plea : "I am astonished that you thus address yourselves to me. Nobody within the borders of my realm has the right to commit murder." Against the names of all the granddukes, the Czar's signature stood out like an angry and accusing finger.

Nicholas II never looked deeper into the grandducual dissatisfaction and knew nothing of their plot. Nobody dared to hint at such a possibility in the Czar's presence. Rasputin might have had the courage, but Rasputin was dead now. Deeds of members of the imperial family were above public criticism. No Minister of Police was permitted to report to the Czar infractions committed by members of the imperial family ; the Czar alone could judge whether punishment should be meted out—and now the time for it was at hand ! The plea of the granddukes was nothing short of insubordination ! Only then the Czar remembered that the best regiments of his Guard were in the hands of the granddukes ; he thought, too, of that snow-covered road from Petrograd to Czarskoje Selo. They who had pleaded for murderers might easily become murderers themselves !

Not one member of the imperial family was invited to the imperial Court for Christmas, 1916. The usual congratulatory messages and presents were omitted this time. The Czar had prepared utterly different gifts for granddukes forgetful of their duties.

Grandduchess Maria Pavlovna and her son Boris were commanded to leave for Kislovodsk immediately, "in the interest of their health." Grandduke Nicholai Michaelovitch was ordered to leave for his estate while Grandduke Andrew was banished to the Caucasus. Grandduke

Cyril received the order to start upon a trip of inspection to Murmansk, north of the Arctic Circle.

Even on the very eve of the revolution the words of the Anointed One exerted the spell of a mighty sorcerer on the granddukes. Like automatons, with no will of their own, they stood at attention, clicked their heels, and mechanically affirmed: "At your service, Your Imperial Majesty!" All plans of a gallop through the night to Czarskoje Selo were forgotten.

Several weeks later, on the 12th of March, 1917, revolution broke out in Petrograd. When the City Commandant, General Chabalov, at his wits' end, found himself facing empty barracks, two companies of the Life Guard, flags fluttering, suddenly marched into the mutinous city to the sound of martial music. The blue-uniformed units lined up on the snow-covered drill-ground. At the head of the Marines of the Guard marched Grandduke Cyril himself. As the only one of all the imperial cousins ready to give battle to protect the throne, he had rallied the last loyal troops.

Alas, neither the blaring bands and the trim appearance of two companies of the Guard, nor the firm tread of a Romanov could change the course of history. One day later the Grandduke led the same units in parade to the Duma. Handing over his troops to the new rulers, he relinquished his command.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

SAVEZ-VOUS ? L'EMPEREUR A ABDIQUÉ !

**T**HE lethargy of Nicholas II at that juncture was not unlike that of a consumptive whose spirit has already separated itself from the body. God had granted the Czar twenty-four years of rule ; doubtless, in His Omnipotence and Mercy, He would provide yet another year—a year which would definitely decide the fate of the Empire. Generals, staffs, and the attachés of the Allied Powers—unanimously optimistic—assured the Czar that the bloody war was already won.

Only old Admiral Nilov—everlastingly under the influence of alcohol—indulged in dark doubts. The inebriated old salt stumbled through General Headquarters, mumbling disconsolately : “ The revolution is coming. They are going to hang all of us. As for me, it hardly matters on which lamp-post they’ll string me.”

On Friday, the 9th of March, 1917, the Czar was informed that his children had been stricken with measles at Czarskoje Selo. Simultaneously the first rumours of imminent hunger riots in Petrograd laid a breach in the wall of evasive reports which kept the Emperor out of touch with realities. The Czar read about the anticipated revolts with his usual equanimity. After all, Petrograd represented only an infinitesimal dot amidst the immeasurable realm. That day, if the Czar actually was a trifle more taciturn than usual at breakfast, it was because he worried about his children, and not about an incipient revolt in Petrograd.

During the next few days humming telegraph wires recorded the history of the Russian Empire.

A message from the Czar, addressed to General Chabalov, then Military Commander of Petrograd, stated : “ I command that unrest in my capital city be put to end by to-morrow since it is not in keeping with difficult times of war. Nicholas.”

A telegram from Prime Minister Golizyn to the Czar, read : “ The Ministers’ Council is unable to cope with the situation and begs to be dismissed. It appears advisable that some person, enjoying general confidence, be appointed Prime Minister in order to form a responsible ministry.”

At the same time a telegram from Rodsianko, President of the Duma, was received at General Headquarters : “ Situation serious. Anarchy rampant in capital. Government paralysed with military shooting at each other. A man enjoying country’s confidence must be commissioned to form a government.”

A day later, Rodsianko again wired to the Czar : “ Steps must be

taken immediately as situation is more threatening than ever. Tomorrow will be too late. The last hour has struck which will decide fate of country and dynasty."

After reading the telegram, the Czar remarked to Court Minister Frederiks : " That stout Rodsianko has wired me all kinds of nonsense again. I do not believe I shall bother to answer." Thus the Czar manifested how inconsequential he considered the rebellion in his capital city. To his mind, czarist power rested in the people as a whole. What difference, then, could it make if the scum of the nation rioted in Petrograd ? After all, the best of the people surrounded the imperial headquarters in Mogilev in unswerving fealty.

Not before the 12th of March did the ominous rumble of the revolution reach General Headquarters. Fear reflected in his eyes, General Alexeijev brought the Czar the latest news from Petrograd. His face a mask of imperial hauteur, Nicholas read of the revolt of the Volinsky and Litovsky regiments, of the flight of the ministers, and of the general helplessness of the Duma.

It seemed there was no end to the telegraph tape conveying most incredible messages that day. Suddenly, Nicholas II asked : " How is it that the rebellion met with such little opposition ? "

" Your Majesty, the reason is simply that all reservists and recruits were left in the capital city."

" Oh, is that it ? "

A brooding silence gripped the room. The General's eye-glasses glittered nervously. A short statement, one redeeming word of the monarch, and the flags of the mutinous troops would be dipped before the ruler in all humility. But that word was never spoken. The possibility of granting a constitution was never so much as considered.

The Czar arose. " I am late," he said, " the attachés await me for luncheon."

" But, Your Majesty, what about a reply to the capital ? "

" Why, here it is ! " And from the mountain of telegrams the Czar extracted the War Minister's report : " Unrest being suppressed firmly and energetically by loyal troops."

After luncheon, the Czar enjoyed a motor trip. Upon returning to headquarters he found a telegram from Czarskoje Selo which read : " Give in. Strikes continue. Many troops have joined the revolutionaries. Alix."

The Czar straightened his frail figure, a strange light gleaming in his eyes. " Well, General," he said, turning to Alexeijev, " what is to be done now ? "

The General, trembling under the smouldering glances of the Czar, stammered : " Only one thing seems possible now." Then he lapsed into silence and nervously moistened his lips. Suddenly he clicked his heels, and, surprised by his boldness, he blurted out : " Your Majesty, if troops revolt, there is but one thing to do : Assemble loyal units and march on Petrograd."

" Very well. We will do just that," the Czar decided briefly.

Gloom hung over the Czar's dinner table. Steeped in sombre thought, everybody kept silent. Only one man—the Czar's neighbour, old General Ivanov—spoke. He was a little man with a long, pointed beard and shrewd eyes. His chest was covered with a row of rattling medals. The blue veins that marked his small hands betrayed his advanced years. He stroked his beard and smiled, resembling an evil dwarf.

The situation seemed very simple to old Ivanov. All that was necessary was to enter Petrograd at the head of loyal troops. Bands blaring, the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching soldiers would re-echo along the wooden pavement of Nevsky Prospect. Perhaps a few shots, a forceful yet paternal reprimand addressed to the unruly rabble, and the entire city would grovel at the Czar's feet. Simple, indeed !

The General talked on incessantly, his words conjuring up strange and gruesome visions. Yet there was not much this old man could gain ; perhaps a word of imperial thanks, or another medal. Then, he would retire to his warm fire-place and, amidst his intimate circle of friends, drone about the persuasive powers of a little military display.

General Ivanov talked until the clock struck eight. At nine o'clock, he was appointed dictator of the capital city. At ten o'clock he wired the commandant of Czarskoje Selo : " You are requested to prepare quarters for thirteen battalions, sixteen squadrons and four batteries."

While old General Ivanov, smiling and smug, prepared himself for the campaign, the Czar received in audience General Alexeijev, Palace Commandant Vojekov, and Count Frederiks. Vojekov implored the Czar to return to Petrograd, immediately ; Alexeijev, however, was of an entirely different opinion. The Czar kept silent while the three men gazed at him expectantly. He could not help remembering three other men whose glances had been just as expectant, almost a full decade ago, on that gloomy autumn day, the 30th of October, 1905. Those three men had forced him to set his signature to a fateful manifesto. The memory of that experience weighed upon the Czar. He was so immersed in thought that he hardly heard Alexeijev's words. Behind the General's greenish face—ill and feverish from overwork—Witte's gigantic shadow arose. Nicholas straightened ; he would not listen to Alexeijev ! " I will proceed to the capital city to-morrow. I shall make my decisions there," he informed his anxious visitors.

At five o'clock the next morning—March 13th—the Czar left Mogilev. For the last time the train of the Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias sped through the country. At the provincial borders, governors boarded the imperial coach, wearing gala uniforms. Police commandments saluted the train wherever it halted. Regiments, on their way to the front, greeted the imperial train with loud huzzas. Governor-Generals stood stiffly at attention and announced : " Beg to report most respectfully to Your Imperial Majesty, that the government of the province entrusted to me . . ."

Undisturbed tranquillity apparently prevailed throughout the

country. Arrived in Vjasjma the Czar telegraphed to the Czarina : " With you in my thoughts. Hope you will keep calm. Marvellous weather. Your loving Niki."

In the meantime a veritable deluge of telegrams descended upon the imperial desk. Visions of a bloody purge, resulting from General Ivanov's measures, caused great trepidation in the revolutionary capital. Trembling at the thought of imperial fury, Rodsianko wired that, thanks to his exertions, quiet and order had been restored ; that the Duma was successfully stemming the chaos ; and was awaiting the monarch's immediate decisions.

Not one word in Rodsianko's telegram was borne out by fact. Nevertheless, in the depressed atmosphere of the imperial special coach, Rodsianko's message created the desired result : General Ivanov received orders to postpone his march on the capital and a short telegram from the Czar made Rodsianko Prime Minister, asking him to meet the Czar's train in order to report in detail.

The Czar spent a sleepless night from the 13th to the 14th of March. At three o'clock in the morning his train came to a sudden halt. There was a knock at the door and Palace Commandant Vojekov entered : " We are in Little Vyshera, Your Majesty," he said, " about 150 kilometres from Petrograd. The rest of the route is occupied by revolutionaries. Your Majesty's entourage deems it advisable to take another route, perhaps towards Pskov, where Adjutant-General Rusky and his staff are quartered. If necessary the General could dispatch troops to Petrograd."

The Czar arose, slipped into his lounging robe, and replied simply : " Very well, then, let's go to Pskov."

At ten o'clock that night the Czar's train arrived in Pskov. His feet encased in galoshes, his shoulder stooping under the burden of heavy gold epaulets, a bent grey-haired man with a pinched face boarded the imperial coach. He was General Rusky, and he reported : " Revolution in Kronstadt. Strike in Reval. Street fighting in Moscow. Anarchy, mutiny, and dissolution everywhere." His voice broke as he counselled : " There is no alternative, Your Majesty, but to capitulate unconditionally."

" But what about Rodsianko ? " asked the Czar.

" He is not coming."

" Why not ? "

The General shrugged ; he did not pretend to know or understand the reason. Nor could the Czar comprehend the meaning of it all. How could these two surmise that proud, fat Rodsianko—at whose request the order for General Ivanov's march on Petrograd had been countermanded—was himself a prisoner of the Soviets now ? It was they who prohibited his departure from the capital.

Until late into the night General Rusky conversed with the Czar. Then he rushed to the telegraph office to inform Rodsianko of the monarch's decision : " To save the country, and in the interest of the people, I command you to appoint ministers of your own choice

However, I reserve for myself appointments of ministers of the Interior, War, and Navy."

It was too late !

Until break of dawn Rusky communicated with the capital by telephone and telegraph. In those cold night hours Rusky sacrificed his honour as an officer, broke his oath of loyalty, and betrayed his Czar, all because of a wild phantom conjured up by Rodsianko. Powerless, threatened by the Soviet, deserted by the Duma, Rodsianko pretended to be the strong man of the hour. He demanded the Czar's abdication. He told Rusky that Gutshkov and Shulgin, as representatives of the Duma, already were on their way to receive the document of renunciation from the monarch's hand. Rusky did not defend his sovereign with one single word. He did not threaten to send regiments to the capital to protect the Czar and to squelch the revolution . . . but, at dawn, he got in touch with General Headquarters, whereupon inquiries as to the availability of loyal troops were dispatched to all corps commanders.

At ten o'clock, on the 15th of March, the replies were received. Rusky once more boarded the imperial private coach. Nicholas listened, calmly enough, to the General's report. So the capital really was in revolt with no loyal garrison left ! Well, then, they simply would take a few divisions from the front, march on Petrograd and suppress the revolution.

In reply to the Czar's proposed plan General Rusky placed seven telegrams on the desk. Seven dire messages, announcing the already accomplished, irrevocable debacle ! The commanders on all seven fronts demanded the monarch's abdication. Not one among them was willing to lead his troops in protection of the throne. The whole army had deserted the Czar !

The monarch's face hardened into a mask of stone. "My adjutant-generals . . ." he stammered. He slumped into his chair. Something overpowering seemed to be strangling him. He fingered the telegrams. Among them was one by Grandduke Nikolai Nicholaievitch. He read his uncle's message once more : "As a loyal subject, I consider it my duty to implore Your Majesty, on bended knee, to save Russia for the heir to the throne, and to renounce your heritage in his favour. There is no other choice. With an especially fervent prayer I beseech God to lend you strength and guidance. Adjutant-General Nikolai."

"My uncle !" whispered the Czar, his face ashen. He stared out of the window, then turned to Rusky and challenged : "And you, General ?"

Rusky bowed his head, his answer was written clearly on his grey, drawn face.

The Czar arose, looked at the General long, and, in a hollow voice, dictated : "To the Chairman of the Duma : There is no sacrifice I would not bring for the weal of dear Little Mother Russia. That being so, I am willing to renounce the throne in favour of my son, under the regency of my brother Michael."



THE CZAR AND THE CZAREVITCH AT CZARSKOJE SELO L.A.A.



Rusky pocketed the memorandum, as yet unsigned, and left.

Alone, the Czar's mask dissolved, revealing a face distorted by anguish. A few weeks before his death, in memory of that moment, he was to write into his diary : " I have forgiven all my enemies except one. I shall never forgive Adjutant-General Rusky."

Presently, seventy-eight-year-old Count Frederiks stumbled down the aisles of the train. Opening the door of each compartment, he shouted hoarsely : " Savez-vous ? L'Empereur a abdiqué !"

Half an hour later the Czar's entourage furtively watched the monarch as he paced up and down the platform, accompanied by the Duke of Leuchtenberg. At the train windows, old generals wiped their eyes. The Czar extended his hand to a few and they kissed it respectfully. Nicholas's face was calm.

" My God ! How can a man show such fortitude ? After all, he could have stayed in his compartment," sobbed General Dubensky.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the imperial private surgeon, Feodorov, was commanded to appear before the Czar. " I have resolved to abdicate in favour of my son," the monarch stated. " For this reason, Professor, I demand to know the whole truth about the Czarevitch's health."

The Professor trembled. " Your Majesty, hæmophilia is incurable. Although there are cases where a bleeder reaches a considerable age, most of them die in their youth. The life of one so afflicted always is subject to accidents. I do not think the Czarevitch ever will reach his twentieth year."

The physician compressed his lips. From the strange trembling that shook the Czar's shoulders, he knew that he must be crying. But Nicholas only said : " Thank you."

A few minutes later, Rusky received orders to return the memorandum of the Czar's abdication.

Gutshkov and Shulgin reached Pskov after nightfall. They were ushered into the monarch's presence immediately. Nicholas received them in his ordinary grey Cherkessian suit. He extended his hand and invited them to sit down. Gutshkov spoke at length, but never once looked the Czar in the face. Nicholas, meanwhile, appeared almost bored. Then, with all the mannerisms of an officer in a crack Guard regiment—as if aristocratic aloofness was meant to remove a personal element from the conversation—he said : " Yesterday and to-day I have spent every hour thinking over the situation. I have resolved to renounce the throne. Until three o'clock this afternoon I was ready to abdicate in favour of my son. Later, however, I came to the conclusion that I cannot separate myself from him." Nicholas paused for a moment, his face as immovable as a mask. Then he resumed : " I hope you will understand the feeling which prompts me to renounce the throne in favour of my brother Michael."

The depressing air of a workaday conference pervaded the room. It was as if, in this small compartment furnished in the style of the *Empire*, the most ordinary affair in the world was being settled. The

Czar reached for the memorandum of abdication and, with one stroke of the pen, he eliminated the reference to the Czarevitch, leaving only the name of his brother Michael. Then he signed the renunciation—and with his signature the three-hundred-year reign of the Romanovs came to an end.

"Very simple, with no ceremony whatsoever, just as one official hands his desk over to another." That is how an eye-witness described the epochal scene on the 15th of March, 1917.

In the course of the night Gutshkov remarked to Rusky: "Even if we were dealing with an iron character of superhuman self-possession, we should have noticed something stirring in the man. But there was nothing, absolutely nothing. It seems impossible for a normal human being to behave in that fashion. He is simply a man who lacks all emotion. He abdicated as if he were merely handing over a platoon of soldiers."

Even as Gutshkov expressed his wonderment, Nicholas sat alone in his compartment. Bending over his desk, he wrote in his diary: "All around me there is nothing but treason, cowardice, and betrayal."

At one o'clock in the night, the train, bearing the Last of the Czars, left Pskov in the direction of Mogilev. The Czar was to say farewell to his army. While *en route*, two telegrams reached him: Two generals of the Guard—Count Keller and the Khan of Nachitshevan—offered Nicholas their troops to suppress the revolution. After three hundred years of reign the House of Romanov found only two loyal servants within the borders of the realm: one of them a Baltic nobleman, the other a Trans-Caucasian Tatar.

The imperial train reached Mogilev at two o'clock in the afternoon of the following day. General Alexeiev was on the platform. The Czar only half listened to reports from the front. However, when he heard that his brother Michael had also abdicated, he seemed startled, then shrugged as if it were all beyond understanding. Through a line formed by officers of the staff he strode to his automobile, the imperial standard still fluttering from its hood.

The Empress-Mother arrived the next morning; Nicholas awaited her at the station. After greeting the cossacks who accompanied Maria Feodorovna, he boarded the train, closing the door of the compartment behind him. Two full hours Nicholas spent face to face with the aged woman. When Grandduke Alexander finally entered the compartment the old Empress was sobbing bitterly; Nicholas, his head bowed, stood in the centre of the room, smoking. The Grandduke embraced him silently. Of what use were words now?

At eleven o'clock the next morning, generals, members of the staff and other high officers assembled in the great hall at General Headquarters. "Nicholas," writes an eye-witness, "entered the room with an air of remarkable poise, a slight smile playing around the corners of his mouth. He thanked the staff, asked everybody to forget old grudges, to serve Russia loyally, and to lead the army to victory. Then he spoke a few words of farewell, expressing himself in the brief

manner of a military man, careful to avoid all pathos. His modesty created a splendid impression on everyone. We broke out into cheering that was more fervent than it had been in all the twenty-four years of Nicholas's reign. Many cried openly. Somebody stepped out of line to beseech the monarch, on bended knee, to reconsider his decision. Too late ! Russia's autocrat could not take back his word. He bowed, and left the room."

Tears welled in Nicholas's eyes upon his departure from General Headquarters. Observing his emotion, the soldiers of the bodyguard were, in turn, overcome. They fell to their knees and wept like so many helpless children. An old man, his chest covered with medals, slumped to the ground, foaming at the mouth and twitching in convulsions. Nicholas turned away from the distressing scene and entered his motor-car.

Three days later, Nicholas stood on the platform of Mogilev station. The train was to take him to Czarskoje Selo. Granddukes Alexander, Sergius, and Boris, and army commanders and generals in gala uniform, had assembled. They gazed upon their Czar for the last time ; for the last time they saluted the old Russia. A few minutes before the train's departure, General Alexeijev stepped forward. In the presence of the granddukes, under the very eyes of the assembled army commanders, he raised his hand and announced that Colonel Nicholas Alexandrovitch Romanov, ex-Emperor and former Commander-in-Chief, now was the prisoner of the Provisional Government.

Nicholas boarded the train. He stood at the wide window of his compartment. The locomotive screeched, and his wistful face, his simple khaki shirt, adorned only with the Order of Holy George, disappeared from view. Not one of the granddukes, generals, or soldiers, ever was to see him again.

On the 22nd of March, 1917, at half-past eleven in the morning, the train drew up at Czarskoje Selo station. As the Czar stepped into his motor-car, the report of a shot rent the air. A lifeless body, arms flung high, toppled from the locomotive. Having taken the train of his Czar to Czarskoje Selo for the last time, the engineer of the imperial train had committed suicide.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### THE PRISONERS OF CZARSKOJE SELO

**I**T was Madame Sasanova, wife of the former Minister of the Interior, who informed the Czarina of the outbreak of the revolution. On Monday, the 12th of March, Madame Sasanova had been invited to Czarskoje Selo for breakfast. Early that morning she telephoned to say that she would be unable to avail herself of the all-highest invitation because of the street fighting in the capital, with most of the regiments having joined the revolutionaries.

Simultaneously—as if this information had made the first breach in the bulwark of official optimism—Czarskoje Selo became more and more deserted. Suddenly ministers vanished from the palace: adjutant-generals and officials of the Court discovered that urgent business awaited them elsewhere. Those left behind seemed inordinately preoccupied and, before long, the entire Court buzzed with fantastic rumours and plans.

At nightfall the palace was steeped in opaque darkness, the electric current having been cut off; soon afterwards the water supply ceased. Only the motionless silhouettes of the guards, surrounding the palace, reassured the Court that, as yet, not everything within the Russian Empire had come to an end.

Shots rang out in the darkness. Revolutionary songs became increasingly audible, the strains of wild music piercing the night air. The revolting garrison of Czarskoje Selo was marching on the palace to storm the seat of "the tyrant." At midnight loyal units of the bodyguard rallied around the palace. Swathed in a white shawl, the Empress emerged from the palace, her feet sinking deep into the snow. Her face was even whiter than the shawl she wore as she pleaded with the soldiers. The soft-spoken words of the Czarina insured peaceful slumber to the imperial children—abed with measles—at least for that one night.

On the following day regiments that had remained loyal until then rallied around red flags and marched to the Duma. The empty rooms of the palace presently overflowed with armed hordes of revolutionary soldiers. They invaded the rooms of the children and flung themselves on the soft, silk-covered divans. With bucolic curiosity they stared at the Czarina, clad in nurse's uniform, bending over the ill heir to the throne.

There was no news from the Emperor. Telegrams addressed to him were returned with the annotation that the whereabouts of the addressee were unknown. For three whole days the Empress, tortured by fear and despair, spent most of the time in prayer.

Old Grandduke Paul, gravely ill himself, brought the Czarina news of the Czar's abdication. Alexandra Feodorovna was stunned. Her hands clutched the table ; she stared vacantly and repeated, as if in a trance : "*Abdiqué, abdiqué.*"

At last she bowed her head and said softly : " My poor, poor darling ! He is all alone in his sorrow." She wept long and bitterly. Line by line she read the fateful manifesto. Later, she told Madame Vyrubova : " Do you realize, Anna, that the Czar's abdication means Russia's ruin ? "

Her grief notwithstanding, the Czarina's brain worked feverishly. She was the first one to grasp that, juridically, the Czar's abdication was invalid. The learned jurists in the imperial private car had completely forgotten that the Emperor was unable to overthrow the Paulian law of succession to the throne, and that he had no right to renounce the crown on behalf of one of his agnates. With courage born of desperation, the Czarina clung to the wording of the manifesto. Perhaps it was merely a stratagem on the part of the Czar ; or just an evil dream that would vanish as soon as Nicholas himself appeared on the scene. She steadfastly refused to accept what had happened as irrevocable. Although greatly worried, she was not altogether hopeless, and anxiously anticipated the Emperor's arrival.

However, it was beyond her strength to inform her children of the terrific change which had come into their lives. M. Gilliard, tutor of the heir to the throne, assumed the task of advising the ailing Czarevitch that his father had abdicated.

" I came to Alexius," he reported later, " and told him that the Emperor would return from Mogilev to-morrow, not to go back there again.

" ' Why ? ' he asked me.

" ' Because your father is no longer Commander-in-Chief.' The news saddened Alexius for he had delighted in visiting his father at General Headquarters. After a little while I added : ' Do you know, Alexius Nicholaievitch, that your father will not be Emperor any longer ? ' "

" The Czarevitch gazed at me in astonishment. ' Why, but why ? ' "

" ' Because he is very tired and he has gone through a severe strain recently.' "

" ' That's right. Mother told me that Father's train was stopped on the way here. But later, Papa will be Emperor again, won't he ? ' "

But M. Gilliard was powerless to answer that question.

" I explained to Alexius that the Emperor had renounced the crown in favour of Michael Alexandrovitch, but that he, too, had rejected it.

" ' Who will be Emperor, then ? ' he asked.

" ' I don't know. Nobody for the time being.' Alexius said nothing about his own right to the throne. However, his face flushed and he seemed extremely excited.

" A few minutes later he demanded : ' But if there is no czar, who will rule Russia ? ' "

The answer to this question came from an entirely different, and wholly unexpected, source. A red sash across his chest, a general with a swarthy complexion and the eyes of a Mongolian swaggered into the palace. In a loud voice he demanded to see the "ex-Czarina." He was ushered into a *salon* where the Empress received him in her *négligé*.

"What is it you want, General?" she inquired coldly.

Under the Empress's icy stare the General clicked his heels and stood at attention. "It is my disagreeable duty to inform you that for your own safety I am forced . . ."

The Czarina interrupted him. Her firm voice had a metallic ring as she declared: "I know everything. You have come to arrest me."

"Quite so."

"Anything else?"

"No."

Without another word the Czarina swept out of the room. The general who had called on her was Laurus Georgievitch Kornilov; six months later he became leader of Russia's first White Army.

During long dreary evenings the Czarina burned her letters, diaries, and notes; sorrowfully she watched the flames crackle and gleam in the open fire-place. Shots occasionally rang out through the old park. In the wet, deserted lanes, revolutionary soldiers were killing the tame deer—pets of the Emperor—their blood incarnadining the white snow.

Unexpectedly, and without his usual entourage, the Czar appeared in the palace, on the 22nd of March, accompanied by merely a few soldiers. Like a seventeen-year-old girl, madly in love, the Czarina hastened to meet him, throwing her arms around him. She rushed him off to the privacy of her suite, and there they remained for fully four hours.

The Czar was overwhelmed by the ill-fortune that seemed to be his destiny. That amazing self-control which the whole of Russia had regarded with admiration or scorn, deserted him completely now. He wept long and bitterly and when eventually he spoke his words crushed all the Czarina's hope. "If the whole of Russia," declared Nicholas, "would go down on its knees and beg me to ascend the throne again, I would not do it."

At last, at twilight, the Czar grew calmer. Together with his friend, Prince Dolgorukov, he left the palace for a stroll through the park. From her window the Czarina, her face tear-stained, observed six revolutionary soldiers pummelling the Russian Czar with their fists and the butts of their revolvers. At the same time they shouted: "You can't go there, Colonel. Turn back. Don't you hear what we are telling you?"

Nicholas retreated to the palace surrounded by the jeering soldiers.

Thenceforth the Czar was watched continuously. At all times an officer of the revolutionary troops shadowed him. These officers changed rapidly. Each of them was received by the Czar with a handshake and a friendly smile. Once, when he extended his hand to a

new-comer, the officer turned away brusquely. The Czar, obviously hurt, asked politely: "But why, what have I done to you?"

"When the people extended their hand to you," retorted the officer, "you spurned them."

Not a word, not one syllable, was permitted to penetrate the chain of revolutionary soldiers surrounding Czarskoje Selo. In vain the Czar sought to ascertain his mother's fate. The sole connection with the outside world were revolutionary papers, which printed long articles to the effect that the Czarina had informed the German Supreme Command of Russia's military secrets, day after day, and that she also had planned to poison the Czar.

For the small circle that had remained loyal, one day followed another with dreary monotony. On the first day of Easter the palace witnessed a sorry scene as compared to past glories. At ten in the morning the hundred and thirty-five servitors still loyal assembled in the imperial suite. Czar and Czarina distributed Easter eggs—the very last from the pantry stores. Each egg bore Nicholas's handwritten signature. Presenting a lady-in-waiting with one of them, the Emperor said: "Be sure to keep it. It is the very last I can give you."

After midnight mass the Czar stepped up to his gaolers and, in accordance with Russian custom, embraced and kissed them. The courtiers viewed the ceremony sadly. They could not help thinking of the kiss with which Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord.

Night after night the Czar spent long hours in his library. Standing before the rows of books he searched for an answer to the question when and where he had committed that grave mistake which eventually had brought on the developments of the 15th of March. He read a great deal, chiefly historical books and volumes on military science, plodding through them methodically.

His thoughts were with his army continuously. He was filled with grave doubt whether it would be possible to maintain discipline. From the windows of his room he beheld slovenly officers, trembling at the very sight of their subordinates. His soul was overwhelmed with agony. "What does Providence hold in store for our poor Russia? But God's will be done," he wrote in his diary, and after these words he drew a large cross.

When the Provisional Government abolished capital punishment in the army the Czar assumed that this law was intended to save his life in case he should face a revolutionary tribunal. However, the thought that the whole structure of the army might be weakened by such leniency, impelled him to send word to the Provisional Government that he preferred to receive a death sentence rather than see the discipline of the entire army jeopardized. The army, and the continuation of the war until victory was achieved, appeared more important to the Czar than his life, his family, and his throne.

It was to the army, and not to the revolutionary masses, that the Czar had relinquished the crown of the realm. The whole of Russia

might wonder what had induced Nicholas to renounce the throne without a struggle, but the Emperor himself knew that his real reason had been his desire to uphold the fighting spirit of his troops. And only the victory of these troops could justify his renunciation and all the humiliation it entailed. On the day of his coronation, at Uspensky Cathedral, he had solemnly pledged himself to his God-given office as Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias. On the day of the declaration of war, he had sworn not to rest until the last enemy had been driven from the soil of his realm. Now he was prepared to sacrifice his first oath for the second. If he could not gain victory for his country as Czar, perhaps, then, his renunciation of the throne might make victory possible !

Surely, after so many sacrifices, God would not permit his very last one to be in vain ; so that the defeat of the army would be the final, bitter draught in his cup of sorrow ? When Nicholas was informed that the Russian army had won a victory near Solotshov on the 19th of July, he wrote jubilantly : " I feel newly born after this splendid news ! "

As a drowning man clings to a straw, so the Czar hopefully regarded Alexander Feodorovitch Kerensky. This man, whose words seemed to mesmerize all Russia, had cast a spell upon Nicholas, too. The Czar did not bear a grudge against the successor to his power. When the Provisional Government granted Kerensky almost dictatorial prerogatives, the Czar wrote about the man who had caused his downfall : " He is just the man who is needed these days. The greater his power, the better ! "

The Czar pondered little over his own fate and that of his family. If his wish to retire to Castle Livadia was not granted, allied Great Britain—where his aunt was Queen-Mother and his cousin, King—certainly would offer him a sanctuary until the end of the war. According to rumours the Provisional Government was already negotiating for his imminent departure for England.

Indeed, steps toward an early departure of the Czar's family had been taken during the first days of the revolution. Not before the 5th of April, however, did the British Government state that the King of England would be glad to receive his cousin. The Provisional Government, genuinely concerned over the fate of the imperial family, immediately declared its readiness to defray the expenses of the sojourn in England. Through the mediation of a neutral country, it had allegedly been possible to obtain the promise of the German Government to permit the Russian imperial family to reach England, unmolested. These preparations continued until the 23rd of April.

On that day the ambassador of Great Britain, Sir George Buchanan, received word that his country had withdrawn its offer and could not undertake to extend hospitality to the Czar and his family.

Three months later the cook at Czarskoje Selo received orders to prepare food for a five-days' trip, and it was via the imperial kitchen Nicholas II learned that he and his family were to leave shortly. The

imperial family packed their trunks, in complete ignorance of their destination. The Czar was utterly unaware that negotiations with England had come to naught many months ago.

In the afternoon of the 13th of August, Kerensky appeared at Czarskoje Selo, elbowed his way through the crowd and, in the presence of Bolsheviks, addressed the Czar in an incredibly rude manner. However, as soon as there were no witnesses around, Kerensky behaved very correctly, even going so far as to address Nicholas by his imperial title.

"Your Majesty," Kerensky asked, "have you confidence in me?"

Nicholas kept silent. Perhaps, at that moment, his mental eye reviewed the long row of ministers who, for twenty-four years, had directed the identical question to him. Kerensky was to be the last one among them.

"Yes," the Czar finally replied.

"Well, then, Your Majesty, believe me when I say that everything I do is done expressly to save you, and not to destroy you. Do you believe me?"

"I believe you," said Nicholas.

Thereupon Kerensky informed him that the imminent journey would take him and his family to the city of Tobolsk, in the heart of Siberia.

On the day of departure, despite the early hour, a large crowd surrounded the palace. The multitude booed and whistled. The imperial motor-cars were forced to make a detour. Under military escort, the Romanov family was conveyed to a distant railway station where they found a train awaiting them. The Czarina, who had been ill in bed when the order to leave came, was taken aboard the train with great difficulty. Upon reaching her coach she toppled over, lying prostrate on the floor.

Thus Nicholas II embarked upon the long trek to exile . . . over the same road he and his forebears had sent innumerable rebels against Government and God. Slowly, as if unwilling to make the journey, the train moved towards the distant steppes of Siberia. Although the heat of summer was upon them, before the Czar's eyes danced imaginary flurries of snow, spreading a white blanket over all who were now travelling towards that land whence there was no return—neither for czars nor for rebels, neither for granddukes nor for criminals, neither for leaders nor for those misled.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

### A SIBERIAN WINTER

**F**ROM the Czarina's letters, written in the city of Tobolsk, Siberia, to Madame Vyrubova :

"I am reading a great deal but, otherwise, my thoughts dwell in the past—so rich in beautiful and dear memories. God will not forsake those who love Him and depend upon His unending mercy. He will help us when we least expect it, and save our unfortunate country. We must have faith and patience."

"I am now knitting a pair of stockings for the little one since his others are worn. Do you remember how I used to knit stockings in the winter? I am still doing it for all of us. Papa's trousers have been mended innumerable times. The girls' garments are full of holes. 'Oh, Lord, save Russia,' my heart cries out, day and night. It is my only thought. Dear God, how our country suffers! Now, more than ever before, I love our stricken land, tortured internally, and dismembered by the enemy."

"The bridegroom cometh, we must prepare ourselves to receive Him. We must doff our soiled vestments, throw off terrestrial dust, cleanse body and soul and renounce the vanities of life! Everything in this world is vain. Let our brows touch the ground for the Ruler of the World approaches. We must bow, in all humility, before His Cross!"

From the Czar's diary: "My name day passed in sorrow, so different from last year! At noon a mass was held. The chausseurs of the Fourth Regiment awaited me in the garden and offered congratulations. I congratulated them, in turn, upon their regimental fête. In the evening, Maria, Alexius, and M. Gilliard performed in a little play, *Le fluid de Jahn*! We laughed a great deal."

"The cold is growing more intense, especially in the evening. To-day Alexius and I finished studying the history of Peter the Great. I started to copy Tchekov's play *The Bear*, since Olga and Maria are to rehearse it."

"To-day, a telegram was received with the information that the Bolsheviks, or the Council of People's Commissars, have accepted the Germans' peace terms because hostile troops are advancing and there is nobody to oppose them. What a nightmare!"

In the centre of Tobolsk, on a hill, gleam the golden cupolas of the churches. The broad, straight streets are lined with wooden houses. A two-story, square, white building, occupying a wide space, was once the residence of the governor of the city of Tobolsk.

At the beginning of August, 1917, Colonel Eugene Kobylinsky put in an appearance in the white building—a signal for frenzied activities. The old furniture was renovated, a piano was brought into the *salon* and two soft feather beds were purchased from a wealthy Siberian merchant. A high wooden fence was built around the front of the house, thus creating a closed-in courtyard.

Half of August had gone by when the inhabitants of Tobolsk beheld a detachment of soldiers march down the main street, serving as escort to a blond colonel of slight stature, a prematurely aged woman, four young girls and a boy of thirteen. The group disappeared behind the fence of the governor's residence. The heavy door of the house shut after them and the good burghers of Tobolsk crossed themselves. It seemed unbelievable that, in the full light of day, guarded by soldiers, Czar Nicholas II Alexandrovitch had been led, as a prisoner, through the streets of their city.

In the governor's house at Tobolsk, the days passed in dismal procession, one exactly like the other. The imprisoned, imperial family arose at nine in the morning. After breakfast, the children attended to their lessons while the Czar read and the Czarina busied herself with her knitting. At eleven o'clock the prisoners went for a stroll in the small fenced-in courtyard. One o'clock was meal time. Later in the day, after tea, the Czar would work or play with the heir to the throne. The small group permitted to share the exile of the imperial family—teachers, physicians, and a few old courtiers—joined them at dinner.

On Sunday, accompanied by soldiers, the imperial family attended mass, conducted by an old pope. While Nicholas piously crossed himself each time a prayer was said for the Provisional Government, the priest, surrounded by clouds of incense, felt tempted to invoke the blessings of the Lord upon the crown of the autocrat. On the twenty-fourth anniversary of Nicholas's ascension to the throne the venerable pope actually raised his hands to the miracle-working icons. His voice seemed to shake the very foundations of the church as he pronounced the holy prayer: "To the Most Autocratic, Most Orthodox Emperor, Nicholas II Alexandrovitch, *plurimos annos*." Thereafter, the imperial family was no longer permitted to attend church.

In the courtyard of the government building, the Czar chopped wood. Splinters flew in the air; drops of perspiration appeared on the imperial brow. Observing him, the soldiers jestingly remarked: "If they will only let him work that hard he's sure to win back his whole country!"

Eventually the simple soldiers were disarmed by Nicholas's friendliness. There was a rare charm about the imperial prisoner, which the people of Tobolsk found enchanting. Before long the soldiers brought flowers into the house and occasionally, when they addressed Nicholas as "Colonel," it sounded almost like "Your Majesty." One night, the newly appointed Chief Commandant Pankratov, who had spent twenty-seven years in the Siberian prisons of the Czar, inspected the

guards. He discovered, to his great chagrin, that Czar and soldiers were playing checkers peacefully and conversing in a friendly fashion in the small guard-room. The detachment was dissolved immediately ; a new, more dependable platoon arriving to take its place.

The new soldiers introduced a new spirit in the house of exile. During their first night there they destroyed the snowman which the Czar had made for his children. The imperial family's walks were greatly curtailed and packages no longer were delivered. More and more, what was first only a detention, now assumed all the unpleasant aspects of unmitigated imprisonment. Drunken soldiers staggered through the rooms, insulted the Czar and, driven to brutality by drink, invented ever-new indignities and chicaneries. Eventually, when the victorious Bolshevik soviets laid their hand upon the city of Tobolsk, the last vestiges of a human existence disappeared for the unhappy prisoners.

During dark winter nights the rooms of the imperial family were bitter cold. The prisoners' table now lacked eggs, coffee, and even bread and butter. Still decorated with the large double-headed eagle, the imperial bill of fare was filled in daily with pedantic care ; finally, it announced only cabbage soup for the noonday meal and baked potatoes at night.

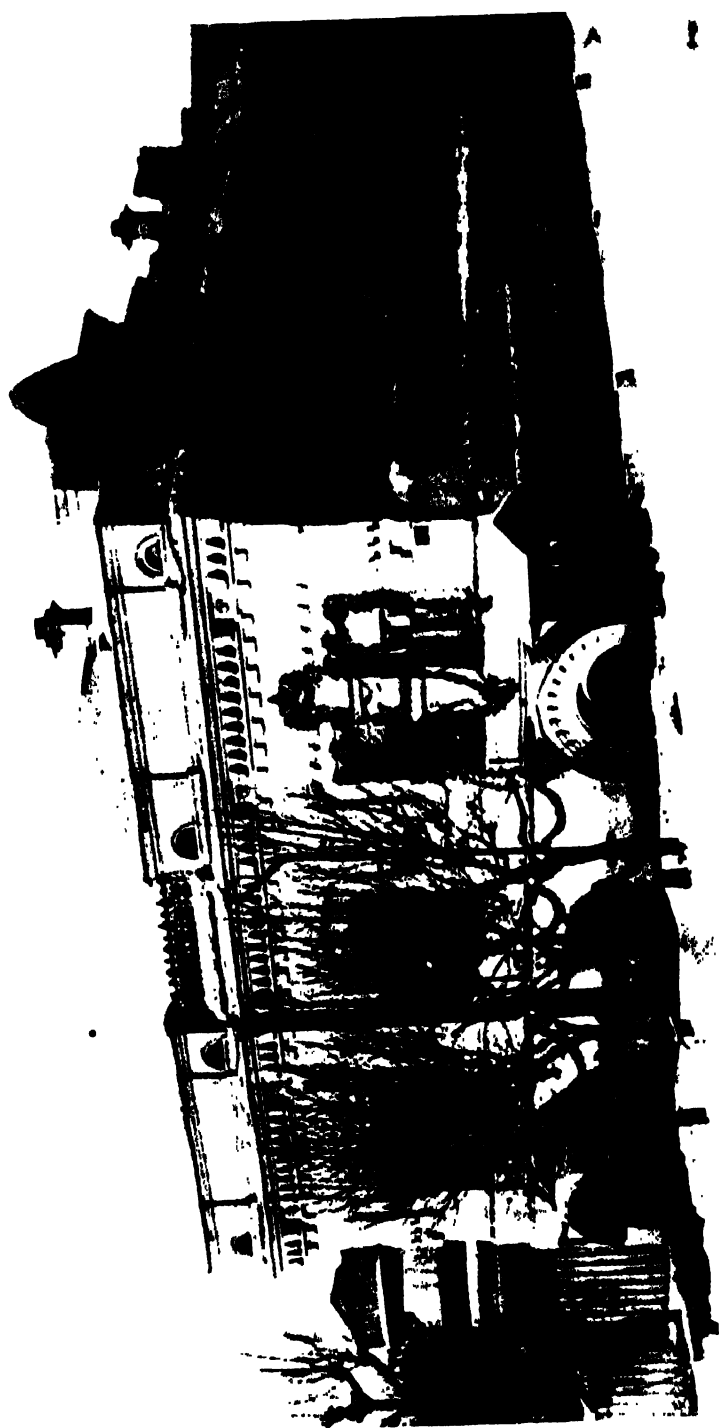
As the sufferings of the Czar's family increased, respect for the prisoners grew throughout the city. *Mushiks* and burghers, passing the house, doffed their hats and crossed themselves. Many knelt down and spent hours on end in pious meditation. An old colonel donned his tattered gala uniform, pinned on all his medals, and stood stiffly at attention before the Czar's house until, hours later, he was led away. In the kitchens of rich merchants, cakes were baked, hams smoked, and Siberian titbits prepared. By ingenious detours this food eventually reached the pantry of the prisoners.

When the pay of the Czar's gaolers ceased because the Government no longer sent any money, the leader of the detachment could obtain a loan from affluent Siberian merchants only after the Czar's adjutant-general, Prince Dolgorukov, had expressed his willingness to sign a note in the name of the monarch. In this way the Czar himself had to provide for his gaolers.

News of the outside world rarely reached the Czar. From the only newspaper published in the city—a miserable little sheet printed on greyish yellow paper—the Czar gathered that his entire realm was breaking up, that the Germans were victorious, and that dire suffering harassed his people. Thus he had to face the fact that the last and greatest sacrifice of his life had been made in vain. "It was then," M. Gilliard writes, "that I heard the Czar deplore his abdication for the first time. He suffered terribly, observing the wretched conditions resulting from his renunciation. The thought of it followed him incessantly and caused him great spiritual agony."

Day after day the Czar taught history to his son. The more he tried to explain to the Czarevitch the past history of the realm, the

## ITALY HOUSE IN FRANKENBURG. WHERE THE ROMANOV'S MET THEIR FATE





better he himself came to understand his forebears. The closer he regarded them, the more clearly there emerged from a sea of blood the luminous figures of the founders and augmenters of the realm. Even if the entire world looked upon Russia's past czars as spectres covered with blood, Nicholas knew it had been Peter the Great who had rebuilt the realm ; that it had been Peter's daughter, Elizabeth—first in all the world—who had abolished capital punishment in her country ; that Alexander I had freed the world of the Napoleonic yoke ; that Alexander II had given freedom to a hundred million serfs ; and that he, Nicholas, was the descendant of a family who, in three hundred years, had changed a turbulent Muscovite realm into an enormous Russian Empire.

Now, alas, this empire had been destroyed and he himself was a prisoner. True, the Czarina and some servitors had timidly whispered more than once that three hundred loyal officers, stationed somewhere in the neighbourhood, stood ready to liberate him and take him to a foreign country. Nicholas would smile compassionately like a wise father, unable to explain to his children that a Russian czar must not add the ignominy of cowardly flight to the shame of his peoples' revolution.

When his comrade-in-exile, Prince Dolgorukov, informed the Czar that, according to rumours, the Germans had demanded of the Soviets the monarch's extradition, Nicholas said : " I assume their intention is to humiliate me. If it were to save me I would consider it an insult." And the Czarina added : " I would rather die in Russia than be saved by outsiders."

A month after this conversation, strange, frightening rumours filled the city of Tobolsk. A new commissar, by the name of Jakovliev, arrived from Moscow. A polite, if somewhat embarrassed, smile wreathing his smooth-shaven face, he informed the Czar that he had been instructed to transfer the imperial family from Tobolsk as quickly as possible. Where he was to take the prisoners the Commissar did not say. However, the Czar concluded, from his dark hints, that he was to be taken back to Moscow—a possibility which he viewed apprehensively. Nicholas feared that the new government in Moscow would force him to put his signature to the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Although exiled and humiliated, Nicholas II still considered himself ruler of All the Russias, and assumed he must still share the responsibility in the Bolshevik peace treaty ; only his signature would give that document validity. However, the Czar firmly resolved not to sign the document, even if resistance meant a bloody end in some dungeon of the Kremlin. Alexandra Feodorovna shared her husband's trepidations. " They need the Czar," she said, " knowing full well that he personifies them. They want to force him to do something evil by threatening those nearest him."

The Czarina's anxiety was intensified by the fact that the Czarevitch was ill in bed, and that the Commissar had scheduled the Czar's departure for the very near future. " O Lord, what agony," the Czarina

cried despairingly. "For the first time in my life I am at a loss as to what must be done. In the past, whenever I had to make a decision, I felt it was dictated to me from on high. Now, I no longer feel anything." The Czarina wept, her pale, drawn face twitching uncontrollably. Her love for the Czar conflicted with her love for her son.

However, when Nicholas entered the room in the evening, she sprang from her chair, threw her arms around him, and sobbed: "I have decided to go with you."

At four o'clock in the morning, on the 26th of April, 1918, Czar, Czarina, and one daughter—Grandduchess Maria—left Tobolsk. The other children and part of the entourage were to await the Czarevitch's recuperation.

The imperial couple travelled through the steppes on small primitive Siberian peasant carts. Eight soldiers accompanied the prisoners. Forging the Tobol River, the wheels of the carriage broke, the horses plunging into the icy water. The soldiers flourished their swords, harrying the poor beasts into dragging the broken-down cart ashore. Their sabres gleamed in the sun. Before the Czar's mental eye the entire scenery suddenly changed. It was no longer water which churned beneath the broken wheels of a lowly peasant cart. It was the dry dust of the Siberian steppes, churned up by the proud troika that had sped Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicholas Alexandrovitch on the last lap of his trip around the world in 1891. Then, the old sooth-sayer of Tibet had predicted for him: "... if Thou completeth the fiftieth year of Thy life, Thou wilt die quietly in Thy bed."

Almost thirty years had passed since then, and once more before the Czar's eyes the Siberian land stretched interminably; once more the little bells tinkled on the horses' manes; once again the sabres in the soldiers' hands gleamed . . . and in another three weeks he would celebrate his fiftieth birthday.

At Tiumen the travellers boarded a train for Moscow. An old sleeping-car had been held in readiness for them. W weary to the point of utter exhaustion, they sprawled upon the red upholstery and were soon asleep.

News spread along the route that the former Czar was aboard the train. Whenever the train halted, workers and peasants assembled, demanding to see the Czar. They blocked the road. It was impossible to gather from their confused talk whether they wanted to kill the Czar or whether they stood ready to assist him to regain his throne. Only with great difficulty did the Commissar succeed in preventing a raid on the train.

The imperial train never reached Moscow. Arriving at the city of Ekaterinburg, it was surrounded by soldiers of the Red Army. The local Soviet had decided that, regardless of orders from Moscow, it would prevent the Czar from continuing further west. Commissar Jakovlev eventually had to retreat before the force of the Red Soviets. Escorted by Red Guards, Czar, Czarina and Grandduchess Maria were

taken to the house of the merchant Ipatiev. Nicholas never left that house alive. The heavy doors of Ipatiev House closed behind him and his family like the gates of death itself.

The history of the Romanovs, begun three hundred years previously in Ipatiev Monastery, was destined to end in the cellar of Ipatiev House.

## CHAPTER FORTY

### "THE HOUSE OF SPECIAL PURPOSE"

**D**ARK mystery enshrouds the end of the Romanovs. Confused reports, vague rumours, and irresponsible hearsay illuminate the darkness like blood-red flashes. All these fragments are like the pieces of a broken vessel that never can be reconstructed.

A high wooden fence—massive and sinister even as the nearby boundless Siberian forests—surrounded Ipatiev House; the place seemed especially formidable because of a strong guard. People slunk past the building, casting fearful glances at it. A grey veil of mystery enveloped everything.

On the second floor of the house, comprising five rooms, Czar, Czarina, and Grandduchess Maria had been quartered. Later, they were joined by the other children who arrived with Dr. Setgius Botkin, the Emperor's private physician, and a few servitors. In time the number of servitors decreased along with those few who came to Ekaterinburg to visit their Czar. Months later the swampy forest surrounding the city gave up their mangled and decomposed bodies.

The rooms and halls of the house were guarded night and day by soldiers and armed workers. Viewing the disgruntled faces of the guards, the Czarina lost all hope of an early liberation of the imperial family. On the window-frame of her bedroom she drew a black cross, pointing in the direction of sunset. The symbol of this cross hovered invisibly not only over the inmates of Ipatiev House, but also over all those who—well-intentioned though they were—busied themselves with badly organized and futile attempts at freeing the imperial prisoners. With the whole of Russia apparently disinterested, but nevertheless watching the prelude to the tragedy now developing in Ekaterinburg, the few bold souls who tried to come to the succour of the Romanovs gradually were caught in the web of Bolshevik sleuths.

There are nebulous traces of one serious attempt to liberate the Czar and his family from the hands of the Bolsheviks. This plan was connected with the Red Commissar, Jakovliev, who came to Tobolsk for the Czar; later, he disappeared just as mysteriously as the imperial family, without leaving any more trace than most of those surrounding the Czar during the last few months.

The reasons which induced the Soviet Government to send Commissar Jakovliev to Tobolsk are obscure indeed. A vague trail leads from Commissar Jakovliev to a European Power, whose secret agent he supposedly was, and not to the Kremlin in Moscow. An unverifiable rumour has it that the Soviets assumed the obligation to deliver the

imperial family to this Power. At the same time, fearing the political effect that might thus be engendered, the Red Government allegedly gave orders to interrupt the trip of the Romanovs at Ekaterinburg. In this way, responsibility for the premeditated murder was to be thrown upon a disobedient, subordinate local Soviet. Nothing definite, however, is known about Jakovliev's mission; he flashes across the scene for only a moment—quiet, courteous, quick and clever—to be swallowed up for ever after in the unfathomable obscurity of Siberian isolation.

The life of the Romanovs within the walls of Ipatiev House is comparable with the dim rays of a setting sun. "We are living here as in a gaol," the Czar recorded in his diary. The meagre reports which percolated through the heavy wooden fence confirmed, and elaborated upon, this melancholy reflection.

In drunken stupor, guards reeled through the building, with House Commandant Avdeev behaving like a vicious dog, broken loose from its leash. His hands never tired of searching the baggage of his prisoners. During these inspections, jewels, clothing, and food disappeared. By sheer brutal force, Avdeev broke the thin, golden chain from which an icon was suspended over the bed of the Czarevitch. When Alexius's servant, the sailor Nagorny, dared to protest, he disappeared via the dark road whence nobody returned.

At Ipatiev House, the Czar, his family, and those who had followed him into exile, took their meals around a long table. The food was brought from a workman's soup kitchen nearby. One of the servants was permitted to prepare macaroni only for the Czarina on a little alcohol burner. The care with which the lackey worked over the dirty stove amused the Red Guardists. Now and then they invaded the dining-room, stirring the food and spitting into the plates. At times the House Commandant also would sit at the table, quickly heaping his own plate with the best pieces. Once, he even struck the Emperor's face with his elbow, as if inadvertently.

The Red Guardists covered the walls of the halls of Ipatiev House with obscene pictures and inscriptions. They sang ribald street songs and often, during the night, they burst into the rooms of the four imperial daughters who had to sleep on the cold floor. They awakened the young girls, and forced them to play obscene songs on the piano.

The prisoners bore their fate with supernatural fortitude. Not for one second was the Czar ever forsaken by his imperturbability. The pages of his diary, upon which he formerly entered, with pedantic accuracy, descriptions of various receptions and ceremonies, he now covered with laconic remarks of such small events as the day brought. "I have just finished reading the history of Emperor Paul I by Schilder. It is an extremely interesting book."—"For our noonday meal, Chariv-tonov served us compote, to our great enjoyment. In the evening, as usual, we played dominoes."—"To-day, during tea, six men appeared, doubtless members of the local Soviet, to decide which of our windows we may open. For the last two weeks they have been unable to make a definite decision in this question."

There is not one single sentence—not even a solitary word—to indicate that the Czar ever permitted himself the luxury of judging his subjects and their actions. Whatever the Czar held against his people was a matter entirely between himself and God. During the last few months of their incarceration everything terrestrial seemed to have been stripped from Nicholas and his family. They no longer belonged to this world. The Empress and her daughters sang psalms; Grand-duchess Olga wrote religious poems, while Tatiana longed for the quiet of a Siberian nunnery. The transfiguring light of a peace, no longer of this world, surrounded the prisoners like the soft folds of an invisible shroud.

The imperial family evidently exerted a strange charm which, for the very last time, re-established that mysterious and magic bond between people and czars that had endured for centuries. The coarse-grained workmen, the drunken soldiers, and the bestial House Commandant, after some time, felt irresistibly drawn toward their prisoners. They were treated with a little more consideration; the nuns of a nearby convent were even permitted to bring food into Ipatiev House. Now and then shame and compassion would make the Red Guardists more human. The Red Government grew apprehensive, fearing that, just as in Tobolsk, the souls of the simple Russians in Ekaterinburg would be captured by the innate attraction which czarism apparently still radiated.

A muffled echo of these fears has been retained for posterity in a telegram which Chairman Beloborodov of the Ural Soviet sent to Chairman Sverdlov of the Central Executive Committee in Moscow on 4th of July, 1918. The telegram reads: "Syromolotov has just left for Moscow to attend to the matter in question according to instructions issued by the Central. Apprehensions unfounded. You are worried unnecessarily. Avdeev is out of the way and has been replaced by Jurovsky. The inside guard has been replaced."

On that 4th of July, 1918, the "house for special purpose" was handed over to the Checka. Thenceforth, a veil of impenetrable mystery hides all further events which occurred within the house. The administration was assumed by the Chairman of the Ural Checka, Commissar Jurovsky who, with ten soldiers, guarded the rooms and halls of the house. Deep secrecy, impossible to penetrate, surrounds these people who alone could tell the ultimate truth regarding the tragic end of the Romanovs.

The men were not Russians. They talked to each other in an idiom completely incomprehensible to Russians. Their names remained unknown. They vanished as mysteriously as they had come, taking with them the secret of Ipatiev House. To the Russians guarding the outside of the building their reticent, taciturn manner lent them the aspect of weird spectres, dispatched from inferno itself. But these ghosts left strange clues behind them. On the porch of the building an investigating judge later found the inscription: "*Veritas Audax* 1918 VII. 15. *örsegen*." According to this, somebody who called himself

Vérnas Andras had been on guard on the porch on the day prior to the murder. In the blood-stained cellar of Ipatiev House, two hastily scribbled lines, apparently the confession of an unknown participant, were discovered on the wall. The words were a quotation from one of Heinrich Heine's poems :

*Belshazzar war in selbiger Nacht,  
Von seinen Knechten umgebracht—*

"And in that same night Belshazzar was slain by his slaves. . . ."

No other clues were left by the mysterious ten within the walls of Ipatiev House.

Only as regards Jurovsky, reports and the testimony of eye-witnesses make it possible to reconstruct a clearer picture. Jurovsky was a tall man with a shaggy beard, a low brow, small eyes, and long, black hair. Born in a Siberian prison, he first had been a dentist, then a watchmaker, and later a male nurse, until an unfathomable fate had entrusted to him the power of life and death over the Russian Czar.

Jurovsky reigned in Ipatiev House during the twelve days which decided the fate of Europe's last autocrat. During that time, Jurovsky left the house for hours, even days. Travelling on horseback, he scouted the forest, surrounding the city. Peasants of nearby villages observed him in the proximity of the deserted Four Brothers Mine, situated amidst a primeval forest. Riding through the wilderness, his bony body swayed in the saddle awkwardly, his silhouette standing out against the background of the forest like an uncanny, fear-inspiring phantom.

One day, a horrible smirk distorting his face, Jurovsky entered the Czar's rooms, sat down on the ill Czarevitch's bed, stroked the child's white, bloodless hands and inquired solicitously about the boy's condition. That same hour twelve brand-new loaded revolvers were brought into Ipatiev House ; Jurovsky distributed ten of these among his unknown accomplices.

Three days prior to the ominous night of the 16th of July, 1918, the pope, Skoroshev, and the deacon, Buimirov, were called to Ipatiev House. For those about to die, the clerics, in full churchly vestment, celebrated the sad rites of the orthodox mass. "It appeared to me," relates the pope, "that, on this visit, Nicholas Alexandrovitch and his daughters were not exactly depressed ; rather they seemed worn and spent. According to the rites of the mass, the prayer 'Repose with the Saints' must be read at a certain point. However, the deacon started to chant the prayer instead of reciting it. I, too, confusedly joined in the chant and, at the same moment, all the Romanovs sank to their knees." After the prayer, the pope handed the cross to the Czar. Nicholas Alexandrovitch kissed it and, together with the sacramental wafer, received the last blessings of the Russian Church. Utterly bewildered, the pope left the house. "I had the feeling that something strange had happened there. The imperial family seemed so changed."

This information, vouchsafed by a Siberian pope, is the last direct word concerning the prisoners of Ipatiev House. Thereafter all authentic reports on the Czar's fate are hopelessly lost in a web of obliterated clues and intentional lies. Like gruesome images arising from desolate chaos, appear the wraiths of eleven people who, during the night of the 16th to the 17th of July, 1918, disappeared from Ipatiev House without leaving any trace. A veritable conglomeration of blood and lies, cowardice and secrecy, lurks in the boastful words of Voikov, Soviet Commissar of Ekaterinburg: "The world never will find out what we did with them!"

The Soviet Government surrounded the events in Ekaterinburg with deepest silence. Like phantoms, afraid of the light, all persons implicated in the tragic affair disappeared. A strict order from the Soviets prohibited all participants from committing to writing any part of their experiences.

The few words which the Soviet Government officially disseminated about the fate of the last of the Russian Czars penetrate the darkness of those days like a bleak reflection from the nether world. On the 19th of July, 1918, Moscow newspapers laconically reported: "The death sentence against the former Czar, Nicholas Alexandrovitch Romanov, was executed during the night from the 16th to the 17th of July. His wife and son are kept in a safe place."

For a very long time this succinct notice was all the Soviet Government would tell the world about the fate of the Romanovs. Even as late as 1922, Tshitsherin officially informed a group of journalists at the Genoa Conference: "The Czar is dead. I don't know exactly what happened to the Czarina and the children. I think they were taken to a foreign country."

Behind Tshitsherin's words there emerges—like a fear-inspiring spectre—the blood-stained cellar of Ipatiev House and the impenetrable secret on the bottom of the Four Brothers Mine. The Soviet's official declaration is rendered grotesque in view of the fact that, in September, 1919, in the city of Perm, twenty-eight people had been arrested, and five executed, for conniving in the mass murder of the imperial family.

In the night of the 16th to the 17th of July, 1918, eleven guards and eleven prisoners disappeared from Ipatiev House. The prisoners were the Czar, the Czarina, the five children, the physician, Dr. Sergius Botkin, the maid-servant Demidova, and the lackeys Charivtonov and Trupp.

A few weeks later the commissars and Soviet authorities of the Ural Soviet, as well as the Checka, vanished from Ekaterinburg. Up Voinnesensky Street, past Ipatiev House, marching behind the national colours, to the strains of a military band, came the White Guards of Admiral Alexander Kolchak. The house with the high wooden fence around it was locked. An investigating commission of the White Government, headed by Judge Sokolov, was ordered to ascertain the facts surrounding the disappearance of the imperial family.

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### THE END OF THE ROMANOVs

**S**IGNIFICANT clues were presently unearthed in Ipatiev House by the investigating judge. On the second floor of the house, where the prisoners had been quartered, Sokolov found empty closets and drawers. Shoes, clothing, linen, and books had disappeared. The ovens were filled with ashes. Doubtless, somebody had burned papers and books, letters and documents. Amidst the debris and empty bottles, strewn about the rooms, the Judge came upon two objects which had been cherished by the imperial family as their most precious possessions: The icon of the Feodorovian Mother of God, and the Czarevitch's medicine. Never, under any circumstances—not for a day or a single hour—would the Czarina separate herself from the stern face of the holy icon, or from the little flask which protected the life of the Czarevitch. What secret power could have induced Alexandra Feodorovna to leave these all-important belongings carelessly behind her?

In the cellar of the house the investigators discovered a small, dark room whose walls and doors showed traces of revolver shots and bayonet thrusts. On the floor, as well as on the walls, brownish red spots were discovered; chemical analysis ascertained them to be human blood.

Inspecting the available clues, without even imagining all the ramifications of the massacre, the investigators discovered witnesses. These were night watchmen, timid peasants, imprisoned soldiers, all trembling for their lives. Their statements floated about the blood-stained cellar, like vultures spying dying game. None of them had been an actual eye-witness of the nocturnal crime in the cellar of Ipatiev House. Nevertheless, a picture of indescribable grimness revealed itself to the investigators as they listened to the reluctant testimony of these fear-struck witnesses.

Judge Sokolov had to draw upon all his powers of deduction to fill in the missing fragments. Every means known to scientific crime investigation was resorted to in reconstructing the macabre deed. Eventually Judge Sokolov collected all available facts; his final report, however, resembles the pages of a book whose most important phrases cannot be read because of the blood splashed over them.

Sokolov reports that in the night of the 16th to the 17th of July the imperial family was awakened after midnight by Jurovsky. Under the subterfuge that an anarchist revolt was brewing in the city, and that the lives of the imperial family were in danger, Jurovsky led his

victims to the cellar. There he left them with the explanation that he was going to requisition a vehicle to take them to safety.

Shortly thereafter, he returned accompanied by ten armed men. He approached the Czar.

"Your relatives tried to liberate you," he declared. "They did not succeed. We must execute you!"

Jurovsky was the first to shoot; after him, the shots of his accomplices rang out. The women's agonized screams penetrated into the courtyard; next, soldiers, rigid with fear, heard the reports of shots. Overwhelmed by bestial blood lust, the murderers rushed at their still gasping victims with their bayonets. Their fingers red with gore, they plundered the lifeless bodies, tearing ear-rings, pendants, and bracelets from them.

The eleven bodies were taken by lorry to the Four Brothers Mine. Under Jurovsky's supervision the corpses were dismembered with saw and knife. Gasoline and sulphuric acid was brought from the city. Jurovsky spent three full days in the bleak primeval forest in cremating the remains of his victims and obliterating traces of the nocturnal crime.

Meanwhile, Beloborodov, Chairman of the Ural Soviet, dispatched the following telegram to Moscow: "Inform Sverdlov that the family has shared the fate of its head. Officially, the family disappeared during evacuation of the city."

Judge Sokolov's report of the horrible butchery is completely convincing in its logical sequence, despite the fact that it is primarily based upon the testimony of intimidated peasants, imprisoned soldiers, and Red functionaries, all fearing for their lives. Not one of them admitted he had been an eye-witness of the murder or of the cremation of the imperial family.

A few reports which subsequently emerged into the light of day from the dark death cellar of Ipatiev House present an essentially different picture of the bloody crime.

In February, 1919, the Red functionary, Sergeiev, was arrested in the city of Odessa. On his person was found a memorandum written by the Checkist Effremov who, according to his own statement, executed the death sentence on the Czar and his family during the night of the 16th to the 17th of July. His memorandum read as follows: "During the night we shot the Romanov family and their confidants, eleven people altogether. I remained in the cellar the whole time. First, the four daughters of the former Czar, Olga, Maria, Tatiana, and Anastasia, were brought in. They conducted themselves quietly enough, although it is possible that they were weeping. We shot all four in quick succession. Then Nicholas II was brought into the cellar with his wife and son. When the former Czarina glimpsed the bodies of her daughters, she screamed loudly and rushed to the side of her boy. We did not waste much talk on her and shot her immediately. As she slumped to the floor she attempted to clutch the feet of Alexis. . . . The former Czar sank to his knees as soon as he had stepped across the

threshold. We raised him up and ordered him to stand at attention. He said good-bye. Beloborodov struck him in the face and kicked him. At the same time some of the men pulled the trigger and Nicholas fell to the floor. The last of them, Alexius, dropped after two shots, but he sighed and groaned for a long time. In order to silence him it was necessary to drill four more bullets into him."

The brutal bareness of this shocking report conveys information vastly dissimilar to Sokolov's painstakingly constructed theory. Unfortunately, the owner of these tell-tale notes was beyond interrogation. Before the document could be deciphered he had been shot by the Whites.

From the dark confusion of lies and legends, bloody tales and falsified reports, arises yet another voice, coming directly from the cellar of Ipatiev House. The voice is that of Commissar Voikov, member of the Ekaterinburg Soviet, whose name is always mentioned with especial significance in connection with the end of the Romanovs.

In July, 1918, Voikov was the authorized representative of the Ekaterinburg Soviet; in 1925 he held the post of the Soviet Minister to the Polish Government in Warsaw. On New Year's Eve of that year the Soviet legation arranged a ball. Gazing upon the champagne bottles, the elegant women, and the well-appointed tables, Voikov suddenly was assailed by sad memories. He left the festivities and stumbled into his study. There, at half-past one in the morning, Legation Counsellor Bessedovsky discovered Voikov behind a battery of empty cognac bottles. Voikov's face was ashen: his inflamed eyes stared at a large ruby ring on his hand. Raising his head, he blurted out: "This is not my ring, you know. I simply helped myself to it at Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg after the imperial family had been shot."

Foisting his gloomy glance on Bessedovsky, Voikov haltingly recounted the role he had played in the execution of the Romanovs. According to him, the order to annihilate the entire family had come directly from Moscow. He had been instructed to inform the Czar that he was under sentence of death. He went to Ipatiev House the night of the 16th of July. At exactly a quarter to three the imperial family was led into the cellar. Voikov began to read the death sentence in a solemn voice. He had read hardly a few sentences when Jurovsky tore the document out of his hand and shouted: "Nicholas Alexandrovitch, you and your family are to be shot by order of the Ural Soviet!"

The Czar looked at him in amazement. It seemed he was unable to grasp the meaning of those terrible words. Then, he clicked his heels and stood up straight at attention. He extended his hand to the Czarevitch. At the same moment, the murderers rushed at their victims with revolvers and bayonets. "Jurovsky's haste," concluded Voikov, "changed a solemn historical act into revolting butchery."

All these reports are full of contradictions. An invisible, albeit dexterous, hand seemed to have obliterated from the memory of the

outrights the names of their accessories and the circumstances of the tragedy. Only the names of Jurovsky, Voikov, and Beloborodov float spectrally through the cellar of Ipatiev House.

Even the Checka Central in Moscow had no information as to the details of the mass murder. While Judge Sokolov considered the annihilation of the entire family proven, Chairman Dshersinsky of the Cheka informed his colleague, Orlov—under the seal of strictest secrecy—that the women had been spared.

Presently, rumours claimed that the Czarina and her daughters had found a sanctuary in a remote Siberian nunnery. There, completely detached from the world, they were allegedly spending their days in silent meditation. Supposedly there was only one human being to whom the Czarina sent word of her survival and the great peace she had found, at last: the Empress-Mother Maria Feodorovna, who had meanwhile fled to her native Denmark. Indeed, to the very end of her days, the cold, stern Dowager-Empress, refused to believe that the anointed family had been annihilated. She even forbade the reading of requiems of death in her house, but never would reveal, when asked, upon what facts her strange conviction rested.

Still darker, even more mysterious and confusing, are the theories of what happened to the mortal remains of the imperial family.

The Four Brothers Mine is situated twenty-four versts from Ekaterinburg, amidst wild, primeval forest. Gloomy tales, told by peasants, surround that haunted spot. Deserted for more years than the people can remember, men and beasts have kept away from the pit in abject fear. Phantoms peer from the underbrush and will-o-the-wisps dance across the swamps. The entire neighbourhood abounds with fearsome visions and fantastic sagas.

Many clues led Sokolov to the haunted forest and the deep, deserted, frozen-over pit. Eventually, with pick-axe and spade, the Judge succeeded in wresting the secret from the bottom of the mine. Icons, precious stones, pieces of clothing, buckles, metal parts of six corsets, a set of false teeth, pieces of skin, a human finger, a dog's cadaver, and charred bones were salvaged from the dark shaft. These terrifying remains, according to Sokolov, were all that was left of the anointed family of the Romanovs.

The eerie enigma, cloaking the end of the Romanov dynasty, by no means was completely solved by these discoveries. It seemed surprising that the murderers should not have noticed the precious stones. It also seemed strange that six women, awakened from their sleep at midnight, should have laced themselves into their corsets, at the same time carelessly leaving behind their most cherished icon and the Czarevitch's medicine. Moreover, it is extremely odd that absolutely no trace of ashes could be discovered and no witness could be found who had been at, or at least near, the mine around the time of the massacre.

Even more incomprehensible is the fact that the only visible and tangible clue to the fate of the Czar does not lead to the Four Brothers

Mine, but to the Kremlin, in the gold-domed city of Moscow. In this connection, Priest Illiodor reports :

"I had to go to the Kremlin to see Kalinin and talk to him about some important church reforms. Passing through a dark corridor my guide suddenly opened the door to a small secret chamber. I entered. On a table, under glass, lay Nicholas II's severed head, a deep wound over the left eye. I was petrified."

In the long, blood-curdling story of the Last of the Czars, no statement is more uncanny than Illiodor's. It conjures up the severed head of Nicholas II guarded by the spirits of his forebears in a secret chamber of the old Kremlin.

According to rumours the severed head was brought to Moscow at the order of the Ural Soviet by the prostitute Gusseva, paramour of one of the alleged murderers. The journey with the head of the Anointed One proved too much for the woman. She lost her mind. Barefoot, her clothes in tatters, her hair flying wildly, she strode through the deep snow of Moscow and, in a babbling voice, told people congregating around her that she had brought back the head of the Anointed One to the holy city of his coronation. Eventually she was shot and her story perished with her.

The fate of the patient sufferer Job followed the Czar even after death. The long chain of misfortune did not even end after he had breathed his last. Whatever Judge Sokolov had found—the charred bones, the fragments of skin and the icons—were swept back to the farthest border of the country when the Whites retreated before the Reds. In Charbin the remains which the dark shaft of the mine had yielded passed from M. Gilliard to the French General Janin, who took them back to France with him. Guarded by him, the mortal remains of the Last of the Czars travelled half-way around the world, almost along the identical route which Grandduke-Czarevitch Nicholas Alexandrovitch once had covered by order of his imperial father.

But there was no rest for them even in France. Nobody wanted to accept the terrifying packing-cases ; one and all shuddered at the mere thought of accepting this horrible cargo from the Far East. From hand to hand, from place to place, the boxes wandered, and the self-same darkness that enshrouds the end of the Romanovs, also veils the ultimate fate of the remains, wrested from the cold depths of the Four Brothers Mine.

Nobody knows their final resting-place. They have all disappeared, even as the ashes of the thirteenth czar on the throne of the Romanovs—that lonely, ill-fated man who once, in Uspensky Cathedral, had announced to the world : "We, Nicholas II Alexandrovitch, by the Grace of God, Sovereign, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, Czar of Kazan, Czar of Astrachan, Czar of Siberia, Czar of Georgia, Grandduke of Finland and Lithuania, of Rostov and of Podolsk, Lord of Great Russia, Little Russia, and White Russia, and Autocrat and Ruler of many other lands. . . ."

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