CHAPTER I

RASPUTIN

A TALL peasant of about forty, broad-shouldered, of robust but lean frame, clad in a peasant's shirt of coarse linen bound with a simple leather girdle, and in wide trousers and heavy top-boots: such was Grigori Efimovich Rasputin when he appeared for the first time in the salon of the Countess Ignatiev, amid that circle of Petersburg society ladies, clerical dignitaries, monks, politicians, schemers, adventurers, charlatans, and Court toadies who met three times a week in the house of the aged Countess.

They had been awaiting, with lively curiosity, the arrival of the "new saint," the "miracle-worker" from Pokrovskoe. And when he entered, peasant-like, with great noisy strides and ungainly movements, and bowed his greetings, his coarse, even ugly face seemed at first to disappoint their anxious expectations. His big head was covered with unkempt brown hair, carelessly parted in the middle and flowing in long strands over his neck. On his high forehead a dark patch was visible, the scar of a wound. His broad, pock-marked nose stood out from his face, and his thin pale lips were hidden by a limp, untidy moustache. His weather-beaten, sunburned skin was wrinkled and seamed in deep folds, his eyes were hidden under his projecting eyebrows, the right eye disfigured by a yellow blotch. The whole face was overgrown by a dishevelled light brown beard. But the assembled company were accustomed to such apparitions and, at first, he made no unusual impression on them.

When, however, he went up to the guests one by one, seized their hands between his own broad, horny palms, and looked searchingly into their eyes, they all felt somehow disturbed. For those eyes had a peculiar urgency. Small, bright, and water-blue, they gazed from under the meeting, bushy brows; restlessly, as if all the while seeking something, they probed, tried,

and penetrated everything within their range. If they rested for a moment on anyone they immediately became keen and piercing, as if they could see right to the bottom of the soul; the next instant they would suddenly assume an indescribable expression of understanding, kindness, and wise toleration.

His harsh peasant's voice, too, could take on a beautiful, deep, and charmingly animated tone. When he spoke he put his head a little on one side, as priests are wont to do when they take confessions, and his speech, then, like his glance, was filled with a thoughtful, monastic benevolence. At such moments the Countess's guests felt him as a good and holy Father in whom they could trust implicitly.

But his glance and speech would change: it was as if an all-devouring sensual desire flamed up in this strange man, his eyes began to blaze, his voice became excited, violent and passionate, confidential and insinuating. His glances and words became lewd, cynical, and full of scarcely concealed suggestiveness, until, unexpectedly, his attitude again changed entirely, and he spoke of mystical and religious things with poetic ardour and genuine flaming enthusiasm.

As he spoke his unbeautiful face acquired an extraordinary animation. Sometimes the quick play of his features and gestures was almost theatrical. In these movements his horny peasant's hands became visible: they were coarse but well formed with long, bony fingers.

Soon a wide circle of women from all classes of society, ranging from ladies of the highest rank down to servant maids, peasant women, and sempstresses, looked on Rasputin as a higher, divine being. Men, too, of all ranks and callings thronged round the miracle-worker—ministers and officials, brokers and spies. Grigori Efimovich was immoderately pampered, admired, and worshipped by them all.

Rasputin's external appearance changed in accordance with the improvement in his social position. He wore costly blouses of pale blue, brilliant red, mauve, or light yellow silk, made specially for him by the most distinguished ladies of the Court and Society, and embroidered with flowers. The plain leather girdle of the peasant gave place to a silk cord, raspberry-

coloured or sky-blue, with big tassels; he wore trousers made of striped English cloth or of black velvet, and boots of the softest leather. In winter, he was wrapped in an expensive fur coat, with a beaver cap on his head and English snow-boots on his feet.

But even in these fine clothes, to which admiring women had accustomed him, he in no way changed his careless, forthright, peasant nature. In spite of everything, he continued to be the *muzhik* with the unkempt hair and beard, dirty hands, and the native, even unseemly, speech of the peasant.

All the characteristics which had made him seem coarse and common on his first entry into the drawing-rooms of St. Petersburg underwent a peculiar transfiguration in the eyes of his credulously enthusiastic women worshippers. While they nervously awaited his coming a stifling atmosphere of overwrought excitement hung over the expectant company. When at last the door opened and revealed Rasputin on the threshold, a tremor passed through all present, as at the announcement of a miraculous event. If he stopped before the women to kiss them three times with bowed head after the manner of the wandering monks, they thrilled with the ecstasy of a religious experience, and called him by names proper only to a saint. They were convinced that God revealed Himself in his words, that the Holy Ghost met them in the glance of his little, water-blue eyes, that his touch transmitted even to their sinful bodies the grace dwelling in him, and that his kisses and embraces sanctified each one of his faithful disciples.

Sometimes he would rise in the midst of the conversation and, à propos of nothing, call on the women to sing him those melancholy folk songs that recall Church music, and of which he was particularly fond. Then he took a few paces forward, remained standing in the midst of the assembly, stuck his hands in his silk girdle, and began to rock himself slowly in time to the singing. Next, he stamped noisily on the parquet floor with his peasant's boots, and began to dance. With circling motions he seductively drew nearer to the women and invited them to dance with him; his beard waved, his boots set the time, and his keen eyes took stock of his partner, who followed his glance con-

fusedly and ecstatically, as if spellbound. The rest of the men and women sat attentive and absorbed in a circle about them, and looked upon the dancing peasant as if they were taking part in a religious service.

Many people, of course, attempted to withstand Rasputin's magic. They tried to keep their heads, and fought with all their might against his compelling influence. But even the few who succeeded, and continued to see the human being with his common features, small, cunning eyes, and unkempt beard, could not quite escape his mysterious power.

Some spoke of hypnotism, and tried to break the strange spell of the miracle-worker with a dry, scientific word; but this was of little avail against the living impression of Rasputin's personality.

"How peculiar his eyes are," confesses a woman who had made efforts to resist his influence. She goes on to say that every time she met him she was always amazed afresh at the power of his glance, which it was impossible to withstand for any considerable time. There was something oppressive in this kind and gentle, but at the same time sly and cunning, glance; people were helpless under the spell of the powerful will which could be felt in his whole being. However tired you might be of this charm, and however much you wanted to escape it, somehow or other you always found yourself attracted back and held.

A young girl who had heard of the strange new saint came from her province to the capital, and visited him in search of edification and spiritual instruction. She had never seen either him or a portrait of him before, and met him for the first time in his house. When he came up to her and spoke to her, she thought him like one of the peasant preachers she had often seen in her own country home. His gentle, monastic gaze and the plainly parted light brown hair around the worthy simple face, all at first inspired her with confidence. But when he came nearer to her, she felt immediately that another quite different man, mysterious, crafty, and corrupting, looked out from behind the eyes that radiated goodness and gentleness.

He sat down opposite her, edged quite close up to her, and

his light blue eyes changed colour, and became deep and dark. A keen glance reached her from the corner of his eyes, bored into her, and held her fascinated. A leaden heaviness overpowered her limbs as his great wrinkled face, distorted with desire, came closer to hers. She felt his hot breath on her cheeks, and saw how his eyes, burning from the depths of their sockets, furtively roved over her helpless body, until he dropped his lids with a sensuous expression. His voice had fallen to a passionate whisper, and he murmured strange, voluptuous words in her ear.

Just as she was on the point of abandoning herself to her seducer, a memory stirred in her dimly and as if from some far distance; she recalled that she had come to ask him about God. As she gradually awoke more clearly to the original purpose of her visit, the heaviness disappeared from her limbs, and she began to struggle in his toils.

He was at once aware of the increasing inner resistance, his half-shut eyes opened again, he stood up, bent over her, lightly stroked her girlishly parted hair, and pressed a passionless, gentle, fatherly kiss on her forehead. His face distorted with desire became smooth again, and was once more the kindly face of the wandering preacher. He spoke to his visitor in a benevolent, patronizing tone, his right hand raised to his forehead in blessing. He stood before her in the attitude in which Christ is depicted on old Russian ikons; his glance was again gentle and friendly, almost humble, and only in the depth of those little eyes still lurked, almost invisible, the other man, the sensual beast.

Painfully disappointed and confused, the girl rose, stammered a few words of farewell, and left Rasputin's house. In her heart she carried with her the terrifying question, Was this man a saint or a libertine?

Another woman, a St. Petersburg society lady, declared with scorn to the French Ambassador that Rasputin had filthy hands, black nails, and a dirty beard. "Faugh," she cried when she spoke of him. But she had to confess that, after a few words, it was impossible for anyone to be indifferent to the glimmer-

ing, inscrutable change in Rasputin's glance, bearing, and words, the cleverness, mystery, goodness, violence, familiarity, ardour, poetry, and attraction of his nature.

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Rasputin's influence was not, however, confined to women. The French Ambassador himself was impressed the first time he met him. M. Paléologue had received unfavourable reports of Rasputin from his agents; he regarded him as a corrupt charlatan, and hated him particularly for urging Russia to make peace.

Once, while the Ambassador was visiting a lady of his acquaintance, the door of the reception room suddenly opened with a great uproar. Rasputin came in, boisterously embraced the lady of the house, and talked with her for some time. Paléologue meanwhile watched him with the mixture of strained attention and distrust that a diplomat usually accords to a suspicious political character. He recorded that the miraculous monk had an "ordinary face," but that its whole expression was concentrated in his eyes, which were as blue as flax. The Ambassador was fascinated for the moment, and had to admit that Rasputin's eyes were at once penetrating and caressing, child-like and cunning, direct and yet remote, and that when his talk became more animated, it seemed that his pupils "became magnetic."

M. Gilliard, the French tutor of the Crown Prince, met the despicable charlatan and hated opponent of war only once, in the antechamber of the imperial apartments, as Rasputin was leaving the Palace. A strange, unpleasant sensation took possession of the tutor. As his glance crossed that of Rasputin he formed the firm conviction that he was in the presence of a powerful and dangerous man. Profoundly disturbed, he made haste to escape from Rasputin's eyes, and at once left the room.

But even the man who had hated Rasputin from the beginning, who set out with the preconceived opinion that the existence of this miracle-worker was a disaster for Russia, that Prince Yusupov who coolly and deliberately wormed his way into Rasputin's favour in order to prepare a murderous attack upon

him—even he had difficulty in escaping the charm that Grigori Efimovich exercised.

When he saw him for the first time, heard his voice for the first time, all the horrible and repulsive things he had previously been told about this man seemed to be confirmed by the sight of him. This peasant, so coddled by women, inspired him with profound disgust: his features were coarse and lacked all trace of refinement; the laugh with which he turned to his audience seemed unwholesome, sensual, and cruel. His face recalled a sly, rank satyr; everything about him aroused suspicion and mistrust.

Prince Yusupov had hardly ever beheld anything more repellent than those little, almost colourless, eyes, set too close together in their unusually deep sockets. They often seemed to be lost in their hollows, and then it was not easy to decide whether they were open or shut. Only an uncanny, uneasy feeling told the Prince that Rasputin was watching him.

But, at the same time, the proud young aristocrat was forced to recognize clearly that there was something unusual in this hated peasant face, and that a strong, mysterious, almost supernatural power lurked in the glance of those unpleasant eyes.

Yusupov was later to learn the full power of Rasputin's gaze. With the object of insinuating himself into his enemy's confidence, he visited him in his own house on the pretext of asking him for medical advice. The young Prince, on an impulse of curiosity, obeyed all Rasputin's instructions, followed him into his bedroom, and lay down on the sofa. At first, when Rasputin was trying to put him to sleep by gazing at him and making stroking movements, Yusupov still retained the power of cool observation, and concluded that the whole healing process of the miracle-worker was nothing but "hypnotism of the worst kind."

Rasputin gazed fixedly into his eyes, slowly stroked his breast, neck, and head, and then knelt down and began to pray, laying his hands lightly on Yusupov's head. He remained in this attitude for a while, then rose and continued the hypnotic stroking. Yusupov set his will against this treatment, but had soon to recognize that a strange warmth was spreading over his whole body, and complete paralysis taking possession of it.

His tongue no longer obeyed him, and he tried in vain to utter a sound or to rise. His limbs lay there lifeless, as if made of lead. Close in front of him he saw Rasputin's eyes, big and powerful. They shone with a kind of phosphorescent glimmer; two tapering rays radiated from them, fused and became a circle of fire, which now approached, now receded. Yusupov's eyelids became heavier and heavier, and slowly dropped; he was on the point of falling asleep and yielding to the will of the nauseous charlatan; but summoning the last remnant of his energy to resist, and struggling despairingly, he finally succeeded in breaking the spell. He left Rasputin's house with the firm determination to destroy this man as soon as possible.

D.T. has another version

CHAPTER II

LEHR- AND WANDERJAHRE

GRISHA, the little son of the carter, Efim Andreevich Rasputin, of Pokrovskoe, loved being in the stable. There he could squat for hours on the low balk under the lantern, and gaze with bright, wide-open eyes at the great beasts, and listen with indrawn breath to the scraping of their hoofs and the snorting of their nostrils. Out on the village street Grisha was a wild and unruly, even alarming, youngster, a ringleader in all the pranks of the peasant children. But as soon as he entered the stable behind his father or one of the men, in his long, wide trousers of white canvas, he became transformed. His childish face took on a peculiar seriousness; his eyes were all eager attention, and his whole countenance had an intense look, as if he must display especial dignity and manliness. With firm, measured steps he marched in behind the grown-ups, feeling that he was entering a holy place where you had to be quiet and serious, as in church.

Best of all were the times when he was allowed to remain alone with the horses. Then he crept up softly and cautiously, and raised his little body on tiptoe, until he was able to stroke and caress the warm bodies of the beasts with his outstretched hand. At such times he showed a tenderness which he never displayed either to his parents, his brothers and sisters, or anybody else in the world. Often he would run cautiously to the door and peer out into the yard to see if anyone were coming. Then with the agility of a monkey he climbed up onto the wooden manger, seized the iron bars of the hay rack, and boldly swung himself onto the back of one of the horses. He pressed his hot cheeks to the animal's neck, and carried on long, wonderful, and tender conversations in a language which his child's heart had invented, and which no one understood but himself and the horses.

To be with the horses was the boy's greatest happiness. He loved the dim light from the stable lantern hanging slantwise from the wall, that strange half-darkness, in which could be distinguished here and there only the shining of a horse's coat or a heap of straw. He breathed in the smell of the stable, and he was never tired of touching the steaming bodies of the animals with hand or cheek. However much he enjoyed running about the meadows with the peasant lads or watching his father sitting angling with the other fishermen on the bank of the Tura, he would have given up all these pleasures for his horses, whom he looked upon as his dumb comrades and secret allies. And it soon came about that Grisha learned to give better advice in any difficulty about horses than the most experienced old carters of Pokrovskoe, so that when anything out of the ordinary happened to their beasts, they more than once sent for Grisha Efimovich.

But what a wonderful place the stable became for him after that evening on which his father first read aloud to him, from the big book with its beautiful pictures, the story of the birth of the Christ-child! Grisha listened to every word of the tale of Saint Joseph, Mary, and the new-born infant, who lay in the crib when the three Kings of the East came to worship him. Henceforward, everything in his father's stable, the great wooden manger and the dimly glimmering lantern, was full of a mysterious meaning which only he knew and of which he spoke to no one.

Once, when old Efim was not at home, Grisha stole into the big room, climbed on a chair, and reached down from the chimney-piece the big book with its wealth of pictures from which his father had read to him. He turned over the heavy folio in its thick covers until he found the picture which showed the stable with the crib and the Christ-child in colours of blue, red, and gold. He waited impatiently for the evening, when he could beg his father after supper to read aloud to him again, and, sitting on old Efim's knee, he looked eagerly at the pictures, while his father read to him the rest of the life of the Christ-child, how he grew up and became the Saviour of the world.

Evening after evening Efim Andreevich, in response to the

boy's entreaties, had to reach down the big book. Soon Grisha knew all the pictures; and as he listened to his father reading aloud, painfully tracing with his finger word by word and line by line, he himself learned the letters and the art of combining them to form words. So Grisha grew up between two equally mysterious worlds: on the one side the stable with its marvels, and on the other the big book with the beautiful pictures and the black signs.

When Grisha was twelve a catastrophe occurred in his life, the effects of which were long felt. He was playing with his elder brother Misha on the bank of the Tura, when Misha suddenly fell backwards into the stream. Without reflection Grisha sprang in after him, and both boys would have been drowned if a passing peasant had not rescued them. Misha fell ill the same day of a serious inflammation of the lungs, and died almost immediately. Grisha's life was saved; but he was so shaken by this accident that he fell into a heavy fever. He recovered rapidly, and was soon playing again and busy with his beloved horses, but there was a change in him. His face, once so plump and rosy, was now hollow-cheeked and pale; and although in the evenings it was covered with a reddish flush, this was not the fresh ruddiness of health, but the hectic stain of fever. His nature also underwent a peculiar change, which caused his parents no little anxiety. No one could say exactly what was really wrong, and even the village herbalist could give no advice; and the lad again fell into violent fever and semiconsciousness, a condition that lasted several days and even weeks.

There was nothing to be done but to make up a bed for the invalid in the "black half," the dark part of the big kitchen. In winter as it now was, while outside the Siberian storms blew from the fields through the village street, this was the warmest and most comfortable place in the house. Besides, the kitchen was everybody's favourite spot, so that someone was always there to keep an eye on the sick child.

At twilight the peasants from the neighbourhood used to assemble and seat themselves on the broad benches round the big stove. The hosts handed round schnapps and Siberian sweetmeats, and the talk went on until late into the evening,

about everything that had happened in the village itself and the news that penetrated to Pokrovskoe from the neighbouring market towns.

On one of these evenings they were all talking in whispers, because Grisha was very ill again. To the anxiety of the household, he had lain for hours completely apathetic, with his pale face turned to the wall and his eyes closed. So his parents and their guests lowered their voices, though they had a particularly important affair to discuss that evening. The night before, a crime had been committed of a kind calculated to excite the minds of all the peasants of Pokrovskoe in the highest degree. One of the poorest carters of the village had had his one horse stolen from the stable, and the poor man was in misery and despair. The kindly peasants of Pokrovskoe, old and young, had searched from early morning for the thief and his booty, but all their efforts had been fruitless.

The peasants were all in a state of furious resentment over the occurrence, for in the eyes of these Siberian carters horse-stealing is the meanest crime, worse and more loathsome even than murder. These men, whose villages not infrequently had originally been settlements of exiled criminals, for the most part regarded even the greatest sinners as "poor weak brothers"; but for horse thieves they had neither understanding nor pity. Anna Egorovna, Efim's wife, had had more than once to point to the sick child, and beg for greater quietness, when the excitement of her guests took a noisy form. Outside it was quite dark, and only a single lamp in the middle of the table threw a dim light on the peasants crouching round the stove.

Suddenly the sick child rose from his bed and walked up to the peasants in his trailing white night-shirt, with cheeks pale as death and an almost awesome glitter in his eyes. Before they had recovered from their amazement the child was already in their midst; he stared fixedly in front of him for a second or two, sprang with a leap onto a giant of a fellow, threw his arms round his legs, climbed up to his shoulders, and sat astride on his back. Then he shrieked out: "Ha! ha! Petr Alexandrovich! You stole the horse! You are the thief!" He burst into unrestrained, childish laughter and, trembling with delight, beat the

peasant on the chest with his feet, as if trying to spur him on, and went on shouting that Petr Alexandrovich was the thief. His voice rang so shrill, and his eyes shone with such a strange light, that all present felt eerie. They had no idea what to make of the boy's accusation, for Petr Alexandrovich was a most respectable and well-to-do man, who had been particularly indignant over the theft, and from the start had demanded a ruthless prosecution of the criminal.

Old Efim and his wife were most disturbed by the incident. If Grisha had not already lain so long sick with a high fever his father would have given him a sound thrashing on the spot, for he was a man who knew how to keep discipline in his own house. Anna Egorovna exerted herself to dispel all memory of the painful incident, and apologized many times to worthy Petr Alexandrovich. The other visitors also tried to restore peace, and even the grossly insulted Petr Alexandrovich finally looked friendly, and expressed his concern for Grisha's serious illness. By the time the peasants departed the same peaceful atmosphere prevailed as before the distressing incident. Nevertheless, some of Efim's guests could not forget the words of the sick boy; they went on ruminating, as peasants do, and at last, here and there, in this cabin and that, several got up and stealthily stole to Petr Alexandrovich's farm. There, in the darkness, one met the others who, uneasy like him, had risen to find out the true state of affairs. Soon quite a number had collected. As they crawled noiselessly on their bellies up to the fence of Petr Alexandrovich's homestead, they suddenly saw him, also observing the greatest secrecy, come out of his house, look round for a few seconds to see if anyone were watching, and then, thinking himself alone, go to a dark hole situated in the furthest recesses of the yard. Immediately afterwards the peasants, to their amazement, saw Petr Alexandrovich lead out the stolen horse and disappear with it into the darkness.

Early next morning the peasants one by one knocked at the door of Efim's house and, making the sign of the Cross, with many invocations of the holy Mother of God and Saint George, related how Grisha had in his fever discovered the truth, and that it was really Petr Alexandrovich who had stolen the horse.

They told how they had crept up behind the criminal, had finally captured him and beaten him senseless. They were all convinced that God himself had spoken through the sick child.

Whatever may be the explanation of this "miracle," whether the boy, his sensitiveness further heightened by fever, had noticed something doubtful in the attitude and words of Petr Alexandrovich or whether in his wanderings through the Pokrovskoe stables he had on previous occasions seen something suspicious, which led to his accusation, in any case the incident caused the peasants of the district, even later, when Grisha was completely cured, to eye him with strange glances, and ask themselves what they were really to think of this queer rascal.

Grigori Efimovich Rasputin gradually developed into a peasant lad like all the rest, frequented public-houses, ran after the girls, and fell into a disorderly and dissipated life. Although he diligently did his share when there was any farm work to be done, he would get dead drunk every night afterwards.

He made very little change in this way of life when later, at one of those Siberian "sessions" at which all the young people of the village assemble to gamble, sing, and dance, he met the beautiful fair-haired Praskovia Fedorovna Dubrovina and fell in love with her. Even when the dark-eyed, slim girl became his wife Grisha could not abandon his dissipated life, and relapsed from time to time into unsavoury intercourse with boon companions and village girls.

Then he underwent his second great experience, which made a profound impression on him, and of which he spoke only to his trusted friend, the peasant lad Mikhail Pecherkin, once when the two were strolling along the bank of the Tura, and, after desultory talk of the harvest, cattle, horses, and girls, came to speak about God. According to his story Rasputin had been striding along the field after the plough, had reached the end of a furrow, and was about to turn the horse when suddenly, behind him, he heard a wonderful anthem like those the village girls sang in chorus. As he turned round he dropped the plough in amazement, for right in front of him he saw a marvellous image, the holy Mother of God swinging on the golden rays of the noonday sun. In the air echoed solemn music from a

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thousand angels' throats, in which the Virgin Mary joined.

The vision lasted only a few minutes, he told his friend, and immediately disappeared again. Grigori Efimovich, shaken and stirred to the depths, stood in the middle of the empty field with trembling hands, and was unable to go on with his work. When he went into the stable in the evening to attend to the horses he felt an inexplicable melancholy. Something in him seemed to tell him that God had some special design on him, and at the same time he knew that, for the sake of this special and higher thing, he would have to leave the horses, the public-house, home, father, wife, and the village girls. So he deemed it better not to think any more about this miraculous vision, and to say nothing about it except to his friend Pecherkin.

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When he reached the proper age Rasputin at first went on with his father's trade, and conveyed passengers and goods over the long straight roads to the neighbouring villages, sometimes as far as Tobolsk and Tiumen, or, in the other direction, to Verkhoture, at the foot of the Urals. For it was only in summer that boats plied up to Pokrovskoe on the Tura, and conveyed traffic downstream to Tiumen, or down the Tobol to Tobolsk. Travellers in these districts in winter were dependent on carriages or sledges, and so the young carrier Grigori more than once drove people into remote localities in the Governments of Tobolsk and Perm.

It was when he was thirty-three that one of his passengers was destined to make a fundamental change in his life, and to inspire him with a completely new spirit. One day he had to drive the novice Mileti Zaborovski, a student of the college of divinity, to the monastery of Verkhoture. During the journey a conversation started between the driver and his clerical fare on faith and the Church, in which the seminarist, to his amazement, was forced to recognize how extraordinarily conversant this simple peasant was with religious matters. The youthful theologian tried to convince his driver how sinful it was to waste all these capacities, and his words made a great impression on Rasputin; for Grigori, even as a boy, had been passionately addicted to meditation on God and the things of faith.

But it was a new doctrine that he heard from his passenger—not the strict Orthodox faith that held out no hope of salvation for a poor and weak sinner like himself, but the joyful gospel that even a sinful man could participate here on earth in heavenly bliss, if only he followed certain biddings of a mysterious "true" faith in God. The seminarist finally succeeded in persuading Rasputin to remain in the monastery instead of turning back and going home.

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Verkhoture was one of those peculiar Siberian monastic communities which, in their aspect and the conduct of their inhabitants, resemble big farms rather than places for the practise of the contemplative life of faith. While the monks of Verkhoture strictly fulfilled all the monastic rules, and were diligent in the prescribed spiritual exercises, they also cultivated their lands and pursued occupations of a worldly nature. It was not, therefore, too difficult for the peasant Grigori to take his place in this half-monastic, half-agricultural community.

Soon he discovered, to his astonishment, that the brotherhood of the monastery was divided into two groups, one of whom played the part of prisoners and the other that of jailers, although this relation was as far as possible veiled and concealed. Rasputin learned that the brothers who were thus carefully supervised and watched were open or secret adherents of heretical creeds, "Khlysty" and other sectarians, who had been sent to Verkhoture to be reformed and brought back into the bosom of the Orthodox Church.

And Rasputin recalled the strange talk of the young seminarist he had driven to the monastery. He remembered how greatly the doctrines of his passenger differed from the ordinary faith of the Church, and it dawned on him that the young man had tried to convert him to sectarianism. He also perceived that the apostate monks who had been banished to Verkhoture, and who were distinguished by strict observance of the rules of the Church, had only pretended to abjure their orthodoxy, and that many of the "prison warders" had already been captured by the beliefs of the sectarians. In fact, the whole monastery of Verkhoture followed the rules of the Church purely in externals, and was in reality a hotbed of sectarianism.

To almost all these monks the strict rites of the Church seemed a mere useless formality, which they were obliged to observe in order to avoid coming into conflict with the authorities, while each one bore hidden in his soul the true faith, of which he would speak only in secret to those holding the same conviction, true to the precept of that Danila Filipich who had founded the brotherhood of the "Men of God," the "Khlysty," more than two hundred years before, and had enjoined upon his followers: "Keep my laws secret, entrust them neither to your father nor to your mother, be steadfast and silent even under the lash or the flames; thus you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and even here on earth receive the bliss of the spirit."

The Khlysty sect drew their greatest strength from mystery, and in order to preserve this mystery, to protect the truth from any profanation, the founders of the new doctrine prescribed that their adherents should strictly observe in externals the forms of the "false faith," Orthodoxy, and even distinguish themselves by special zeal in observance.

Little by little Rasputin learned from his brethren how the customs, prayers, and practices of the Church were necessary only for men who were still unawakened, who still remained in the darkness of common existence, how the Church and the priesthood had missed the right road to God, and how only the prophet of the secret brotherhood could set his disciples on the true way. For the doctrines of the Church clung to the letter, were earthly and lacked inspiration, while the word of the prophet revered by the Khlysty was given him direct from God. The man who, through grace, was in direct communion with the Holy Ghost and with God no longer had need of the laws and forms of the Church devised by human reason. It was only at the beginning, before his enlightenment, that Danila Filipich had been a zealous student of the Gospels and the other religious writings; later, after grace had been vouchsafed to him, he threw all his books into the Volga, in order thenceforward to seek the meaning of truth in the "golden book of life" alone.

Thus Rasputin, the novice in the Khlysty faith, became gradually estranged from the "letter doctrines" of the Church, and drew nearer to the mystical, direct "experience of God." He en-

trusted himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and had become a true "Son of God," an "imitator of Christ," a convinced adherent of the Khlysty sect. Now if he took the communion, went to confession, and bowed countless times to the ground before the ikons of the monastery chapel, he felt that it was meaningless to seek in external ceremonies the divinity that could be found only in the living prophet. To Rasputin, as to all Khlysty, this pretence of Orthodoxy was no sin and no conflict with true piety. By this means they preserved in their hearts the pure true faith, the "istinnaia vera."

This true faith of the "people of God" opened up to Rasputin a world of unique promises, hopes, and possibilities; for according to this doctrine, man here on earth, at any time and in any place, can be united with God, the Lord is ever anew reincarnated among men, and the marvellous birth of Nazareth, when the Son of God became man, was not an event happening once, but is ever repeated afresh.

But to commune with God and participate in all the glories of Heaven the sinful man must first die the "mysterious death of Christ," death in the living body, which is followed by the mystical resurrection. The man who is born only once in the flesh bears in him the doom of Adam, persists in sin, and thereby incurs death. Only the man born a second time in the spirit escapes the laws of mortality and is able to grow towards a higher life. The Khlysty teach that the "mysterious death" can be attained only through complete self-denial and absolute submission to the will of the Holy Spirit, by the subduing of every passion, for rebirth is possible only if the sinful man is completely overcome. But he who has once undergone the mystical resurrection can perform miracles, heal the sick, and foresee the future, by the might of the divine spirit dwelling in him; he can raise the dead from the grave, he has the power to bind and to loose, to rescue sinful souls from Hell and lead them to Heaven, and on the day of the Last Judgment he will apportion rewards and punishments. He rises to a new nature filled with the Holy Spirit, which is at once God and man, a new Christ.

Rasputin learned how God had become reincarnate countless times since the days of Jesus of Nazareth, and had walked

among the people in the form of simple Russian peasants. It even appeared as if the Lord loved to linger in holy Russia and to reveal Himself in lowly Russian men.

God the Father Himself had descended to Russian soil in a fiery chariot surrounded by angels on a mountain in the government of Vladimir in the district of Starodub, in the county of Murov, and had there become incarnate in the body of the peasant Danila Filipich, a one-time deserter. From then onwards the God of Sabaoth had lived in the fleshly envelope of Danila Filipich, wandered through the villages of the Kostroma government, spoken the language of simple people, and shown the peasants the true way to salvation.

Christ, the Son of God, also appeared again on earth at that time, and like the Lord Himself, chose as his abode the body of a sinful muzhik. A peasant woman a hundred years old belonging to the village of Maksakov, also in the Vladimir government, to the mockery of the inhabitants of the village, became pregnant by an old man of a hundred. Ivan Timofeevich Suslov, the child of this strange pair, grew up in the house of his parents, a simple peasant's son like the rest, drank with the village lads and led a careless life, until Danila Filipich, the incarnate God of Sabaoth, encountered him, recognized him as his Son, Christ, and summoned him to his house in the Vladimir government.

Rasputin heard how from this simple peasant house, where Danila Filipich and Ivan Suslov, God the Father and Christ, lived together, a straight road led to Heaven, and how pious and enlightened peasants had often seen the two wonderful men journeying on high. Ivan Suslov had chosen twelve peasants to be his apostles, and with them had wandered along the banks of the Volga, until the Tsar Alexander Mikhailovich arrested them, brought them to Moscow, and there by the Saviour's Gate crucified Ivan Suslov on the wall of the Kremlin. On Saturday, however, the third day after his death, Suslov rose from his grave and appeared to his apostles. He was captured a second time by police spies, flayed and nailed to the cross, but once again the dead rose. He was again caught and, on the day on which he was to be executed for the third time, the Tsaritsa gave birth to a son, Petr Alexeevich, who later bore the name of Peter

the Great. In celebration of this happy event the Tsar released Ivan Suslov from prison, and he lived for thirty years in Moscow, and finally, at the age of a hundred, was raised to Heaven in glory to be reunited to Danila Filipich, his Father.

After the new Ascension of Christ the Saviour again became incarnate on Russian earth and wandered once more among his beloved Russian peasants: this time he chose the body of a "strelets," a humble archer, Prokopi Lupkin, in the Baturin regiment, which had mutinied against Peter the Great and had been exiled to Novgorod.

When the earthly body of Prokopi Lupkin departed this life, the Redeemer descended into the body of Andrei Petrov, a dumb peasant looked upon as mad, who stammered and made meaningless gestures and, summer and winter, clad only in a shirt, roamed through the villages. But the peasants, who know, immediately recognized the Saviour in the fool, fell on their knees before him, and cried: "Christus Andriushka, bless us and save our souls." For the peasants knew that in those who had "died mysteriously and risen again" it is not the man who is revealed, but the Spirit of God; but the revelations of the Holy Spirit are too high for the ordinary human reason to grasp at all times, and so it happens that much in the words and actions of the resurrected may appear like foolishness or madness, for the wisdom of God hides behind the mask of witlessness.

But the story of God's advent in the form of the prophet Radaev came to Rasputin as an illumination. For Radaev, who had wandered among men but a few decades past, was, according to the standards of earthly reason, a depraved and wicked sinner, whose licentiousness was far greater and more serious than anything of which Rasputin himself had ever been guilty. Radaev had practised every kind of carnal sin, and had lived with thirteen women at once in open intercourse. Nevertheless, he had been a great prophet, and, in spite of all his sinful deeds, the Holy Spirit had spoken from his mouth.

Radaev's sins were no sins, for they were inspired by the Spirit of God: even the ugliest deeds of which he, the mysteriously resurrected, might be guilty were, in the eyes of the Lord, more precious and pleasing than the best and purest acts of ordinary

men. In him sin had lost all its power, and thus nothing that he did was to be condemned or rejected. When the self-righteous informers of the Tsar reproached him with his vicious life, and demanded that he do penance, Radaev answered, proudly conscious that God Himself spoke from his mouth: "I know no reason why I should do penance. You know my sins, but the grace of God in me you do not know."

When the divine prophet was arraigned before a worldly court for his depravity and debauchery, he declared that the power of the Holy Spirit had worked in him and compelled him to do every one of his actions. "I was well aware that I was transgressing the law, but I was also aware that my acts proceeded from the will of the Lord. Therefore, all these women who have sinned with me are better and more pleasing in the sight of God than those who resisted me and remained virtuous. For the Lord has appeared in me, put on flesh and sinned in the flesh, that sin might thereby be destroyed. It is only the man who debases himself through sin whose penitence is truly acceptable to God. I have debased the women who sacrificed their chastity to me that they might not be proud and vain of their virtue. What can bring pride lower than abasement through sin?"

And Grigori Rasputin heard that, since the death of Radaev, the Redeemer had appeared again in the form of Russian peasants, and even yet, often in different places at the same time, tarried awhile among the faithful. Wherever the adherents of the secret brotherhood, the "people of God," assemble for solemn ceremonies, the Holy Ghost descends upon the community and chooses the earthly envelope of the worthiest among them, so that Christ may become flesh anew. Close to the Russian earth, too, lies the heavenly paradise of God; the way thither may often be near at hand, somewhere in the village, in one of those houses where the community of the faithful assembles, in order to ascend to Heaven in the "ship," the "ark of the righteous," in the living body.

In this faith Rasputin found the promise of all that he had most deeply yearned for since his earliest childhood. If he could only succeed in opening his heart completely to the Holy Ghost and die the mysterious death, then no sin could tempt him there-

after or seduce him from the path, for whatever he did would be sanctified by the blessing of the Spirit. Henceforth, Grigori Efimovich was swayed by only one longing, only one zealous struggle to tread towards perfection on the way opened up by the doctrines of the Khlysty.

Before Rasputin left the monastery of Verkhoture he decided to visit the holy starets Makari. The hut of this anchorite was at no great distance from the monastery, and no one liked to leave it without having asked for the blessing of this holy man. Not only the monks of Verkhoture, but also men and women of various social classes from far and near came to Father Makari, when they had any heavy burden to bear, any injustice to suffer, or any evil deed to repent. Among the pilgrims who often for days traversed the endless woods and huts of Siberia, barefooted and bareheaded, with a bread bag on their backs and a staff in their hands, to visit the wise Elder, were to be seen beggars and rich peasants, men of the middle classes and aristocrats, common soldiers and officers. No one had ever left the anchorite's hut without a word of consolation, advice, and edification; and, with the homecoming pilgrims, the fame of Makari spread all over Russia.

Rasputin had learned from his secret brothers in the faith that the pious starets had in former times been a great sinner, to whom no passion and no sensual intoxication was unknown. He had experienced all the allurements of the world, tasted to the full all the joys of life, and abandoned himself to all temptations as long as a drop of sin remained in his blood. But when he had purified himself by this sin, when not the slightest evil remained either in his feeling or his thoughts, he had humbly offered to God his purified heart, flesh, and senses.

At first, the story ran, he entered a monastery, and there for many years had subjected himself to the severest mortifications, in order to test his flesh once more, and discover whether he were truly ready to serve the Almighty alone. Then, when at last he was sure that the old man in him had really died the mysterious death, he went into the forest and settled in his hut. There he dwelt, in the "pure joy of the Lord," free from all worldly desire and earthly weakness, and even the iron chains he had fastened

round his emaciated limbs were not burdensome. All earthly limitations had fallen from him; he lived beyond space and time, and could see into the fate of men.

Rasputin's visit to the anchorite was to decide whether he should return home to his wife and children and his jolly boon companions, to his horses and his stable, or whether he should devote his life to a higher task, to which a divine power had summoned him while he was yet a boy.

As a preparation for his visit Grigori went to the reliquary in which the bones of Saint Simeon of Verkhoture were preserved. There, in long and fervent prayer, he found the strength and purity of soul he needed for his meeting with the Starets.

Makari's dwelling lay deep in the forest, and it was a long journey to reach it. It was a poor, desolate hut, in which there was scarcely room for one man. There the old Elder lived in utter poverty and deprivation. But his glance spoke of joy, and a perpetual sunny smile played round his colourless lips. His voice was so weak and low as to be scarcely more than a breath. But it held a note of warmth and vitality.

On arriving at the Elder's cell Grigori threw himself on the ground and covered with kisses the bony hands of the old man in their iron fetters. Then, with the greatest simplicity, he told him of the reasons that had brought him thither, without trying to extenuate or conceal anything. He confessed his sinful life, his evil thoughts, the lust of the flesh that had continued to trouble him in the monastery, and also the strange visions that had been vouchsafed to him. He spoke of his weakness and doubts, how sometimes an inner voice whispered to him that he must dedicate himself to the service of God, but how at the same time there often came over him a longing for his wife and children, earthly possessions, and the tavern.

Rasputin made this confession with head humbly bowed; then he looked up and saw that Makari was smiling at him with kindness and understanding. He felt the skeleton right hand of the saint on his head, its chains rattling slightly: "Rejoice, my son," said the voice of Father Makari, "for among many thousands the Lord hath chosen you. Great things lie before you. Leave your wife and children, leave your horses, hide yourself, go

forth and wander! You will hear the earth speak and learn to understand its words. Then and not till then return to the world again, and proclaim to men what the voice of our holy Russian earth says to them!"

* * * * *

Rasputin returned to Pokrovskoe only to take farewell of his family. Father Makari had sent him wandering, and he himself recognized that all external exercises, penitence, and mortification could only mean a first stage, a preparation for the real "way." In order to be able to tread this "inner way" he must needs take the "outer way" also, the "wandering" or "pilgrimage." Wandering—*uĭti v stranstvo*—is one of the chief acts in Russian mysticism: men of all ages suddenly break off work in the fields or the farm, abandon their former names, throw away their clothes, burn their papers, forget father and mother, wife and children, and plunge into the unknown. They never write or give any sign of life; for years their family and friends do not hear a word of them; they have become "wanderers," "stranniki."

To all sectarians marriage is an intolerable, even accursed, bond, for it is the closest tie that binds a man to possessions and home. According to the Khlysty, among whom this belief is strongest, marriage is a sin against the Holy Ghost, and every "man of God" is bound to separate from his wedded wife, or at least to refrain from marital intercourse with her. But although they condemn legal marriage, blessed by the priest, and therefore in their eyes sealed with the seal of Antichrist, they permit all other forms of love, because these do not bind men for ever to earth and home. Every adherent of the Khlysty sect is thus justified in substituting for the priest-consecrated tie one or several "marriages in the spirit," blessed by God Himself.

Thousands of these wandering sectarians continually roam all over Russia, either without any definite aim, in obedience to the dictates of their feelings, or on pilgrimages to the holy places of the Christian faith, to Athos, Jerusalem, or even Mount Sinai.

In nearly every Russian village there are simple peasants who also belong in secret to the brotherhood of the Wanderers, and whose duty it is to give shelter to the Stranniki. Their steadings

contain a special room, a hay-loft, a closet without windows in the courtyard, or cellar under the "izba" itself, where wanderers in need of protection and rest are lodged. Sometimes whole villages are in sympathy with the Stranniki, and then practically every izba has an underground lodging in readiness for them.

As the strannik goes from one dark hole to another and becomes a "podpol'nik" or "underground man," he gradually strips himself of everything belonging to his former existence that may still encumber him. No one knows his real name or anything of his past, and no one asks whence he comes or whither he intends to go. Free from all earthly restraints, he lives henceforth for his soul alone, and abandons himself to spiritual exercises pleasing to God. Little by little he attains prestige as a being apart, and the peasants are happy when he visits them. The esteem for these "podpol'niki" is extraordinarily great, and far exceeds that given to the priests of the Church. When the wanderer feels that the time of his roaming is at an end, he sometimes gains a reputation for special sanctity: he becomes a "wise man," a "starets," and from all over the country the faithful make pilgrimages to beg for his counsel and blessing. He has completely freed himself from all external things, has banished even from his heart everything binding him to the false world of appearance. His sinful feelings and thoughts are gradually obliterated, and there begins in him the wonderful process of the mysterious death.

Rasputin lived a life of vagabondage for many years, and this period was of the greatest importance for his whole development. In the underground rooms of the peasant houses he continually encountered all sorts of men who, like him, for their souls' sake, had exchanged their ordinary life for the unsettled existence of the "podpol'nik." In intercourse with adherents of the most varied sects, champions of the most fantastic ideas, and in intimate contact with enthusiasts and religious fanatics of all kinds, he penetrated the deepest secrets of the soul of the Russian people, and absorbed the real feelings, thoughts, and wishes of the peasantry. During this eternal vagabondage, and subject to the perpetual persecution of the police and the priests, he became expert in watching men unobtrusively, discovering their

most secret designs, and noting their weaknesses and peculiarities, and he extended his knowledge of humanity to an extraordinary degree.

He came in contact with "Old Believers," those fanatics of the letter who rebelled against the reform of the Church books by the Patriarch Nikon, and who believed that by this sacrilegious change in the method of writing, the word of God became the tool of Antichrist and the Orthodox Church the Whore of Babylon. Other sectarians, again, were ruthlessly persecuted by the authorities because they refused to perform military service; firmly believing in the word of God that he who takes the sword must perish by the sword, they rejected all war. Other fanatical peasants refused to pay taxes because they did not wish to hand over their property to the agents of Satan. They fled from the Government and dreamed of the coming of a new kingdom, the fourth great age, in which the Holy Ghost would assume sovereignty over the earth, punish the servants of Antichrist, and exalt the righteous.

But however different might be the ideas of all these sectarians about the coming redemption, whether they preached the renewal of man through repentance, or tried to participate in the divine grace by rebellion against the world of sin, they were all united by the common desire to overcome the sinful world here on earth, and to enter the Kingdom of Heaven in the living body. None of them was content with the consolations of the Orthodox Church, or prepared to wait patiently for salvation in a life beyond the grave. The firm bond that united all these "underground men" in an inner brotherhood was their concealment in face of the world, their secrecy about their hopes, their faith, and their cult.

In his intercourse with these innumerable pilgrims and wandering monks Rasputin gradually deepened his theological knowledge, and acquired that skill in the use of biblical texts which was later to excite amazement even among the highest dignitaries of the Church. Thus in every respect these years of vagabondage were a most important period of apprenticeship for him, and there is hardly a feature in his later life which can

not be traced back to this time of pilgrimage and "underground" life.

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But Rasputin's greatest and most decisive experience during his wanderings was his real initiation into the mysteries of the Khlysty. What had deeply interested and fascinated him when he vaguely learned of it at Verkhoture, he now encountered in person during his roamings through the countless villages of the vast Russian Empire. For the first time he saw with his own eyes the concealed peasant rooms, monastery cells, or barns in which the great mystery of the "wonderful transfiguration" was enacted. In these "ships" of the People of God Rasputin first truly experienced the miracle of the mysterious death, and found in all this the fulfilment and completion for which he had long been preparing himself by mortification and wandering and the renunciation of a settled life and earthly possessions.

These mystical rites of the Khlysty are strange enough. The insignificant peasant house in which the miracle is to take place looks just the same as all the other huts of the village. On crossing the threshold you pass into a simple, everyday peasant room with rough benches along the walls and a plain table and two chairs in the middle. On Saturday evening one peasant, then another, and many a peasant woman, steal into this house. When "the red sun has set" the window is covered with thick curtains; and the members of the community silently seat themselves on the benches, the men on the right and the women on the left. They sit in the same attitudes as when they crouch round the samovar in their own huts after their work in the fields is done. Even the two peasants, a man and a woman, who take their places in the seats of honour at the table, are no different from the other members of the community: they wear coarse clothes and the dust of the village street still clings to their clumsy boots. But the "people of God," whose hearts know, tremble as soon as their gaze lights on the two figures at the table, for there, in the persons of two simple peasants, are beings endowed with the grace of God.

Now begins the singing of the long-drawn-out hymns resem-

bling litanies, psalms, and folk songs, in which is expressed the longing of the Khlysty for the advent of the Kingdom of Heaven, for God's becoming man, and for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Gradually the singing becomes more jubilant, rapturous, and ecstatic, for the hymns proclaim the appearance of the Saviour in the midst of his shining host of angels. Then the peasants strip off their clothes and shoes, and each puts on a white shirt made of muslin, in memory of the marvellous resurrection of the Christ, Ivan Suslov, on whose body, when flayed by the police informers, the white linen became a new skin. But, at the same time, the donning of the white shirt, the "garment of the departed spirits and angels," signifies to the people of God that they themselves have exchanged their earthly covering for a spiritual one, and have been transformed into beings endowed with special powers.

Clad in their white shirts, by the light of twelve wax candles, they continue the singing, which swells to ever greater heights of rapture and passion, until at last one rises and begins to turn round in a circle. Then others step out of the ranks, men and women, form pairs, and begin a sort of peasant round dance, keeping time to the singing, now following each other round in a circle and now slowly turning round alone.

And soon the simple dance, by a mystical transformation, becomes the dance of the disciples round Jesus Christ as told in the secret writings of the hidden true faith; and just as, in accordance with these secret writings, in the dance of the disciples round the Lord, all the powers of Heaven, sun, moon, and stars, turn in joyful measures around Jesus, the Son of God become man, so the same cosmic event repeats itself at the feast of the dancing people of God. The whole universe dances with the exultant sectarians until "the Lord shows himself in the circle, sounds a blast on the golden trumpet, and gives the world to know that all sinners are pardoned."

Now come different forms of the dance: the faithful, one after the other, traverse the room with skipping steps; then they run crosswise up and down raising their arms aloft and fervently calling on the Holy Ghost. When the ecstasy reaches a

certain height, the people of God feel above their heads the beat of the wings of the Holy Ghost, and the great transfiguration is fulfilled in which everything earthly becomes heavenly. The benches, the table, the chairs, the whole stuffy peasant's room becomes the unearthly "ark of the righteous," the vessel that bears the company through the stormy, swelling sea of the profane external world into the kingdom of bliss. The peasant man and woman in the places of honour at the table become Jesus Christ and the Mother of God, and both steer the ship of the brotherhood of the faithful towards the Heavenly Kingdom.

Now the word is fulfilled, the miracle has happened anew: the Almighty Spirit of God has once again taken on flesh. In frenzied rapture breaks from the people of God the cry: "The Holy Ghost is among us," and they repeat this cry until their tongues are paralysed and a blissful numbness gradually overpowers their movements. The dance ends, the song is silent, and the divine helmsman rises in his seat. He begins to speak, but his voice has changed and sounds now deep and sinister like the cry of an animal, now stammers like a child, and again is jubilant with joyful excitement.

Only those who have been initiated into the mysteries of the Khlysty understand that he who speaks, stammers, and cries, who now breaks into childish laughter and now distorts his face in grimaces, is moved by the Holy Spirit; only they know that it is man newly risen, innocent, and once again as a child, who stammers with his voice. Filled with happy reverence, the sectarians huddle on the ground round the divine helmsman, weep and tremble with rapture, cross themselves, and listen to the blessed words uttered by the prophet.

Then the dancing starts again, even wilder and more unrestrained than before, and lasts till dawn. The voices, the stamping of the dancing feet, and the rustling of the garments mingle in a single confused noise; faces and voices are blurred, shirts billowed out by the whirling are like rotating pillars, and the floor is wet with the sweat of the dancers. Suddenly, amid the mad, ever faster gyrations, the sectarians bare their bodies to the waist and, one by one, half-naked, step up to the prophet,

who flagellates them with a staff made of twisted osier switches to signify the fecundation and generation of the new man in Adam's body.

Then, just as Christ cast off the husk of mortality to rise again in the spirit, the Khlysty, both men and women, cast all their garments from them during their wild dance. Here and there, one of them is seized with convulsions and sinks to the ground senseless; the lights are extinguished, the women with unbound hair fall on the men and embrace and kiss them passionately. In "sinful encounter" the people of God roll on the ground and copulate, regardless of age and relationship.

Only in this mad intoxication of the senses are earthly consciousness and self-will completely extinguished, for in the "sinful encounter" the earthly ego has no more influence, but only the will of the invisible spirit.

Grigori Efimovich Rasputin, the sensual but believing peasant of Pokrovskoe, learned in these Khlysty orgies to understand the real meaning of the peculiar mysteries of rebirth through sin. He perceived that the true inner life was granted only to him who could arouse the old man in himself through the "sinful encounter" and struggle with him, in order to slay him in the mysterious way of sin and attain to "holy passionlessness." Man could never completely overcome all the ties binding him to earth until he had annihilated the last remnants of arrogance and pride in his soul, the arrogance of the ascetic, and the pride of the virtuous. The way to true submission and humility henceforth for Rasputin must be followed through the "sinful encounter," through the casting away of the final barriers, through the deepest self-abasement in carnal sin.

CHAPTER III

THE CELLAR PREACHER

MANY years had passed since Grigori Efimovich had slung on his bread sack, taken his alms bowl and staff in his hand, and set out on his wanderings. For long his family in Pokrovskoe had had no news of him, and his father, old Efim, was heavy-hearted over his son's absence. Efim Andreevich Rasputin had by his industry in the course of the years enlarged considerably the steading he had inherited. He had erected a fairsized, two-story house in place of the old family cabin, extended the stables, and increased the stock of horses to several dozen. His property had thus become a neat, prosperous-looking farm such as is seldom to be met with in Siberia.

But on him, as on Job, one blow of fate after another had fallen. First, God had within a brief period robbed him of two sons and then of his faithful, industrious wife, Anna Egorovna, who, up to the end, tall, slim, and fair, with her silver-grey hair and smiling eyes, had directed the household and sat at the spinning-wheel. She had caught a chill when journeying from Tiumen to Pokrovskoe in the damp autumn weather, and a few days after was carried off. Grigori only had been left to him, a great support to his old father in spite of his drinking habits.

But however keenly the old man might feel about the separation from his son, he never complained, for he was a pious and God-fearing peasant. Had not the wise and reverend Father Makari of Verkhoture decided his Grisha to leave hearth and home, father, wife, and children? Efim Andreevich had given his son a father's blessing and let him go in the pious conviction that work in the service of the Lord was of more account than the work of the world.

And even now, some years after Grigori's departure, the old man still tried to comfort his grief with the thought that God

Himself had need of his Grigori. This conviction gave him a feeling of proud superiority, such as is not infrequently felt by those who are convinced that God has called them to a great task, to make a heavy sacrifice, or to endure an overwhelming sorrow. As this idea took hold of him old Efim spent more and more of his time in church or in the large, ground-floor room, where hung the miracle-working picture of the Holy Virgin of Kazan. There he would pray for hours on end, and gradually he came to neglect his worldly occupations.

He avoided the neighbours and other chance visitors and, even when sitting with Praskovia Fedorovna, the wife of his absent son, and her growing children, he no longer told them wonderful stories of the old times as he used to do, but remained for the most part sunk in a deep, meditative silence. When asked for his orders about the farm work, it was not uncommon for him to look at the questioner in amazement and with a glance that seemed to say: "We, my son and I, now live only for the service of God."

The long absence of her husband also weighed heavily on the spirits of Grisha's young wife. She, too, was religious, and sought refuge from her grief in the wonder-working picture of the Mother of God; but she lacked the firm, proud faith which could comfort old Efim to some extent for the loss of his son. The earthly longing of a young and lonely woman was stronger in her than meek submission to the divine decree. So Praskovia Fedorovna spent far less time in contemplating the holy ikons than in looking at the well-worn picture of her husband, taken by a travelling photographer from Tobolsk. It showed Grigori with a contented, merry face, the straightly-parted hair smoothed down with grease, the face, with its slight light-brown moustache, fresh, rosy, and sunburned. His features and his whole figure breathed strength and gay vitality; but the look in his eyes was both far-away and yet piercing.

Fortunately, the young wife was too much occupied by the work of the household to have much time to devote to her gloomy thoughts. But her heart could not be glad and, as the years passed, she too became silent, quiet, and reserved; she aged

quickly and her pretty features assumed a careworn, melancholy expression.

It not infrequently happened that strange pilgrims, wanderers, or tramps, came to the village and, in accordance with ancient custom, begged for a night's shelter in Efim's house. On these occasions Praskovia Fedorovna immediately became talkative again, and put a thousand questions to the strangers, for she kept on hoping that each new arrival would be able to give her news of Grigori.

In the time immediately following Grigori's departure it really had happened sometimes that one or another of the wanderers declared that he had met a man answering to Praskovia's description. Many pilgrims even thought that they had spoken with Grigori Efimovich and accompanied him for a time on his way. One man reported having met him in a monastery hostel in the Urals; according to another story he had been seen on the high road travelling in the direction of the town of Kazan; other pilgrims believed that they had encountered him in the woods quite close to Pokrovskoe, on the opposite bank of the Tura. But there was never any certainty that they were really talking of Praskovia's husband, for none of them ever called him by name.

But, in the course of time, such news became rarer and more doubtful and, finally, even these few untrustworthy reports ceased entirely. On the other hand, in the third year after Rasputin's disappearance, strange rumours began to circulate among the peasants about a strannik who was causing much talk on account of the numerous miracles he had performed.

More and more frequently travellers came to Pokrovskoe telling of these amazing deeds and also of the curious and novel teaching of this mysterious man. According to these accounts he had appeared first among the fishermen on the upper Tura, had spent many days among them, helped them to bring in the nets, and taught them to sing psalms and other sacred songs. He had also revealed to the fishermen that he was sent by God, and that in him the Holy Ghost had descended among men. According to other stories he had appeared among a group of farm men and women in a field, helped them in the harvesting and, in the even-

ings, told them that the priests of the Church had forgotten the true meaning of the Gospel and the real words of the Saviour; that they no longer knew anything of the joyful message that all sin could be wiped out by repentance, and that God valued the lost sheep more than all the rest of the flock.

Another story had it that this peculiar wanderer held strange services in the depths of the forests with pretty young girls and women. He first made crosses from boughs, and prayed before them with his disciples. When his devotions were over he threw his arms about the women, fondled and kissed them, and then all sang and danced. In explanation he declared that these kisses, caresses, songs, and dances, formed part of the divine service and rejoiced and cheered the Lord.

Soon more serious rumours began to be current among the peasants. It was said that, at these forest services, the stranger did not restrict himself to caressing his "sisters," as he called his women disciples. There were whispers of festivals at which the unknown and his train of women kindled huge fires of leaves and branches, sent up fervent prayers, and sang hymns. Then they all danced round the flames, until the women were seized by a mad delirium, and the prophet cried in a strange voice, "Abase yourselves through sin! Try your flesh!" Of what happened afterwards the horrified peasants dared speak only in whispers, for in the darkness of the forest, lit only by the stars of heaven, the pilgrim committed the most horrible sins with the women.

Soon a report was abroad that this sinister starets was accompanied on his wanderings through the forests and over the steppes by a band of women and girls, who had all left husbands and parents to follow the preacher, in the faith that he alone could save their souls. It was said that, in some more distant villages, the stranger had been seen in the public baths displaying himself to the women completely naked, and making them undress also. The "sisters" had then to wash his dusty feet. He declared that this extreme humiliation of his pupils served to kill the last remnants of their pride and self-righteousness.

At the outset most of the peasants of Pokrovskoe were of the opinion that this wanderer was a false prophet and an emissary

of Satan, especially after the local priest, Father Petr, had given forcible expression to this view. But news came of fresh signs, great miracles, such as can be worked only by saints: that he had driven the devil out of a nun, and that elsewhere he had prophesied events that actually came to pass soon after.

But that which had the most convincing effect on the peasants, and which did more than anything else to establish the fame of the wanderer among them, was the story of how he, on one occasion when the outraged fathers and husbands of his disciples went to attack him personally, raised his arm threateningly, and cried in a terrible voice: "Let there be no rain for three months." And this curse was fulfilled! For twelve weeks the sun blazed in a cloudless sky and burned up the fields, and not until the period had expired did the rain come again. Who but a messenger from God could have the power to stop the rain? Whatever Father Petr might say, the stranger was a holy man, perhaps holier than the priest himself, who was not yet able to command the weather!

There were also people in Pokrovskoe who, on the first news of the appearance of the new starets, had exchanged understanding glances. These were the peasants, men and women, of whom rumour had long had it that they were only in outward appearance pious Christians, and that, in fact, they adhered to the heretical doctrines of the "people of God." No one, it is true, could bring any definite charge against them; but, every now and again, little signs were noticed which indicated that these peasants belonged to the secret brotherhood.

When these heretics assembled on Saturday evenings in their clandestine meetings they, too, discussed the reports about the miracle-worker. But while the other peasants, steeped in the Orthodox faith, were doubtful and argued among themselves whether the strange wanderer was a saint or a devil, the sectarians knew beyond all doubt that this wanderer preaching the doctrine of the meaning of sin was one of themselves. They talked exultantly of the advent of the newly risen Saviour, in whom once again, as so often before, God had become incarnate on earth, in accordance with the eternal rules. All the actions of the stranger that seemed odd and repulsive to the orthodox peasants

presented themselves in a different light to the sectarians. Did not the great Radaev act in this way too? Had not that divine master also proclaimed the truth that man can by carnal vice master his sin, and thus free his soul from all evil? Now another had arisen to preach this doctrine, and the divine spirit was again incarnate on earth, as once before in Radaev and before him in Ivan Suslov and Danila Filipich.

It was not only the sectarians who were exercised by the unknown starets. There was also much talk of him in the house of old Efim Andreevich, when in the evenings the farmer, his daughter-in-law, the servants and neighbours were assembled round the table and on the great bench by the stove. None of the villagers and none of the wanderers who lodged at Efim Andreevich's had ever yet seen the starets personally. But a Pokrovskoe peasant had once met a feeble old man from another village at the market at Tiumen, who reported that he had seen the saint and a crowd of young girls break from the woods and proceed through his village. The old man described the miracle-worker as a lean man of middle size, with a great flowing beard and hair parted on his forehead, and falling over his shoulders like the hair of Christ on the ikons. His eyes had a piercing glance, his face was pale from mortifications and privations, and furrowed like that of an old man; but his voice was gentle and melodious. Although his whole appearance gave the impression of a good and holy man, the old peasant had had a feeling of inexplicable horror at the sight of him.

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Many a long evening passed in such talks and discussions, until one night the great event happened, and Grigori Efimovich came home. Whenever Praskovia Fedorovna looked back on this first meeting with Grisha on his return from years of wandering, it always seemed one of the turning-points of her life. She had had household work to do that evening that had kept her longer than usual from her bed. Suddenly there was a knock at the gate and, looking out, she saw an old, bearded man standing before the door. She took him at first for one of the wandering folk who came to Efim Andreevich's to beg a night's shelter, and she hastened to open the door. Then she knew him; it was his small,

light blue eyes that betrayed him. Although they peered forth from a wrinkled face covered with an unkempt beard, Praskovia immediately recognized the look of cheerfulness and cunning in them.

What followed was as surprising as this first encounter. While they all ran joyfully to greet the returned pilgrim, they could not help noticing the change that had taken place in him. He was glad to see his family again after so long an absence; but his gladness was quite different from theirs, and had nothing of worldly happiness in it. His first words of greeting were uttered in a strangely solemn tone and, as his family clung round his neck, he seemed to ward off their caresses with a gesture that, though tender and kind, was grave and firm. He raised his right hand above their heads in blessing, and made the sign of the cross with priestly dignity; there was a strange expression on his lips, and his eyes seemed to look through them into the far distance. There was something so solemn about his thin figure that father, wife, and children were embarrassed, and shrank back from him.

Before her husband Praskovia had a feeling of reverence, as before a person of high birth or great saintliness. As she set about preparing his bed in the usual place her glance fell upon his thin figure, with its stern and solemn attitude, and, seized with awe and embarrassment, she immediately desisted, and hung her head humbly like a frightened maidservant.

But Grigori asked that the door of the secret cellar should be opened for him. Usually it was only wandering pilgrims in flight from the authorities who found refuge there, or those who, from some inner need, wished to withdraw from men. Whenever Praskovia had descended the dark, narrow steps into the comfortless and windowless room, it had been to conduct some such wanderer to his quarters for the night, and now it was her own husband she was leading down! As the door with its iron fastenings opened, she felt on her face the musty air that comes from damp masonry. The bare room with its low, vaulted roof was lit by oil lamps, in the flickering light of which the beribboned pictures of the saints in the ikon-niche seemed to live a ghostly life.

Grigori Rasputin stayed in this tiny, remote chamber of the

prosperous farmhouse and, day and night, stretched in abasement on the bare floor, he mortified his sinful body and did penance. As Praskovia lay at night on her bed waiting for sleep the despairing prayers and lamentations of the penitent reached her from the depths of the cellar. The anguish of his voice cut sharply through the silence of the night, followed by groaning and wailing. Then the lamentation changed to the jubilant singing of psalms and sacred songs, after which the groaning and wailing began again.

The morning after the first night Praskovia and old Efim went down the dark stairs to the penitent. They remained standing on the threshold shattered by the sight before their eyes. They found Grisha on his knees, his thin body painfully bent in convulsive tremors, and his face almost touching the ground. His sing-song lamentation sounded like a weird monotonous groaning, that began with the repetition a hundred times over of the words: "Lord have mercy upon us." Then the words dissolved into despairing cries that burst, one by one, from the cramped body until they merged again into a single, long-drawn-out, and horrifying shriek, when the penitent suddenly became quiet, as if God had had mercy on his woes. His cramped body began gradually to relax, and his head, with its long hair falling backwards, rose from the ground. Grigori's face, turned towards the ikons, seemed, in the glimmer of the oil lamps, blissfully transfigured, as though bathed in golden light.

As he began to sing psalms with trembling lips there came over Praskovia and old Efim a wonderful feeling such as they had never had before. An irresistible force constrained them, too, to kneel down and join in Grigori's chanting. But this happy change again gave place to despairing outbursts of abasement and remorse, and Praskovia and Efim also bowed their heads, and prayed God for grace and forgiveness for their sins.

More and more frequently Efim and Praskovia, in obedience to the voice from the cellar, with its alternations of lamentation and jubilation, descended to the penitent's dark retreat and took part in his prayers. They began to neglect their worldly occupations, and often spent whole days and nights sharing Grig-

ori's penitential exercises. How it had happened they themselves could hardly explain; but from the moment when his terrible lamentations and the joyful song that immediately followed them had first forced them to their knees, a curious change took place in them also, and the ecstasy of the penitent raised them to unknown heights of religious enthusiasm.

As soon as this great conversion in themselves had taken place they became certain that Grisha had been sent on his wanderings by God Himself, in order that he might become a saint; nor did it surprise them that this rare and divine grace should have been vouchsafed to their Grigori. In their pure and simple faith they had no thought of trying to search out the ways and decrees of God.

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When, in the course of a day or two, the news of Rasputin's return and of the wonderful change in him became known among the peasants of Pokrovskoe, there were many who felt very doubtful about his conversion into a saint; they remembered too well the careless peasant lad he had been, always loafing in public-houses, picking quarrels, and running after women.

An old peasant who, as a member of the local church council, had frequent occasion to call on Efim Andreevich, made up his mind to be the first to go to his house and convince himself personally of the truth of all these curious rumours. Accompanied by his man, he proceeded to the farm and explained that he had heard of the wonderful conversion that God had wrought in Grisha, and earnestly desired to visit the penitent in his cellar. Old Efim immediately showed him the way through the courtyard, and begged him to go down the steps to Grisha's underground room.

While he was crossing the yard the visitor heard the wailing voice coming up from under the ground, and the nearer he approached the steps the more uneasy he felt. The farm servant accompanying him would have preferred to turn and flee, and he was heartily thankful when his master told him to remain in the yard while he himself prepared to descend the stairs.

Even the old peasant hesitated for an instant, but his curiosity, behind which was the curiosity of the whole village, won the

day; he stuck the point of his stick firmly into the ground once or twice in peasant fashion, and disappeared into the opening of the cellar.

With craning neck and eyes half out of his head with excitement, the servant stared after the old man until he disappeared into the darkness. Then he remained motionless by the opening, his heart beating in agitated expectation, for the uncanny and terrifying voice of the penitent continued to rise from the hole. But when the voice suddenly stopped he became really anxious.

A considerable time passed before the heavy steps of the peasant again sounded from the darkness of the cellar stair, and the anxious servant heard his master's stick tapping on the steps. At last the old man himself emerged from the narrow opening and stepped into the yard. The curious servant threw an inquisitive glance at his master; but, when he saw his face, he was so terrified that, in spite of his curiosity, he could not put a single question to him, and he turned and followed his master at some distance as he, with heavy step and thoughtfully bowed head, slowly returned to the village.

Soon the whole of Pokrovskoe was in a ferment of excitement over the old peasant's report of his visit to Grisha, his tales of his lamentations and songs of jubilation, and the strange words he had spoken. The servant's reports about the queer change in his master when he came up from the cellar added not a little to the excitement.

Many of the peasants, after these accounts, were ready without further ado to believe that Grigori Rasputin had been transformed into a saint, especially as they were struck by the resemblance between the descriptions of the old peasant and his servant, and the rumours about the legendary stranger. The conviction gained ground that Grisha was none else than that mysterious pilgrim about whom so many wonderful tales were current. The thought that, of all the villages in the government, it was Pokrovskoe that had been singled out to be the birthplace of a saint was thrilling enough to keep all the inhabitants agog with excitement.

Next day many peasants with their heavy boots and staffs, and many peasant women in wide skirts with gaily coloured

kerchiefs on their heads, proceeded to old Efim's farm. Among them were believers, but also not a few doubters; they were all moved by the same curiosity, to see and hear Grisha. And every one of them had the same experience as the old member of the church council. As they crossed the yard and heard the uncanny wailing voice of the saint coming up from the cellar, they hesitated a while before they made up their minds to descend the steep steps. And when one after the other crawled out of the dark opening again, those who had remained above noticed how strangely their faces had changed and, in awed embarrassment, they refrained, in spite of their excitement, from immediately questioning the others about their experiences.

The same thing befell every one of these men and women: they went down to the cellar full of earthly and profane curiosity and they came out transformed. Among those who visited him were men of his own age, who had spent many a night drinking with him and had played many a stupid prank in his company. It was these peasants who had put least faith in the tale of his saintliness, and they had gone down the stairs firm in their unbelief in their old boon companion. But in Rasputin's presence they fared no better than all the rest.

The new saint made a particularly deep impression on the young women and girls of the village. When they returned to the light of day their relations or friends who had remained outside noticed a delicate flush on their faces, such as love alone is wont to paint on the cheeks of young women. A radiant light shone in their eyes, and a slight smile played about their lips, as if those eyes and lips were aware of a happy secret.

Very soon hardly a single inhabitant of Pokrovskoe doubted that something extraordinary had happened to Grigori Efimovich Rasputin. It is true that much of what the penitent told his visitors of redemption through sin was in flat contradiction of all the traditions of the Orthodox faith and, therefore, it was difficult for many of the peasants to acclaim Grisha as the new Saviour, for as such he was already revered by a large part of the village. This worship of Rasputin originated chiefly with the women and girls, and it seems that it was they who from the start really grasped the meaning of his new doctrines. While the

old peasants still stood before their doors in the evenings, leaning on their heavy staffs, and tried laboriously to bring the preaching of the cellar into harmony with the doctrines of the Orthodox Church, the women, untroubled by any scruples, were asserting Grigori's saintliness in rapturous and enthusiastic words. Every day saw an increase in the number of Grisha's followers of both sexes, and very soon every cabin contained a peasant, old man or young, a girl or an old woman, who was unreservedly devoted to the preacher in the cellar.

One man held out, the venerable Father Petr, the village priest. Both at first, when only vague rumours about the "new saint" reached his ears, and also later, when the sermons from the cellar were known all over Pokrovskoe, Father Petr attacked this impious and villainous false doctrine with the fighting spirit of a truly orthodox servant of the Church. He unflinchingly proclaimed at every opportunity that Grisha was a messenger of Hell, and his preaching of redemption through sin the satanic lie itself, which alone would dare to blaspheme the true word of God. The apostate Grisha was accursed, as also was everyone who fell a victim to his false teachings.

In such or similar ways Father Petr thundered day in and day out; his dumpy little figure stiffened whenever the conversation turned on Grisha, and his eyes blazed furiously. His disproportionately large head, round which the red hair stood up like a halo, his face covered with a curly red beard, and his flashing eyes all gave the impression that the angry little priest might burst into flames at any moment. But in spite of all his anathemas Father Petr had to admit that the number of those who went down to the cellar kept on increasing, and that even the most faithful of his parishioners found pleasure in the shameless doctrines of the false preacher. He remained for whole days in his little house on the hill in the middle of Pokrovskoe, or sat sulking at his window. He no longer went into the village itself, among the peasants who had fallen into the snares of Satan, for his pure faith forbade him to seek any contact with evildoers. So he lay in wait for passers-by in his parsonage, in order to learn what new and terrible blasphemies the devil in the cellar had been uttering.

On the next great Church festival Father Petr prayed long in his chamber before the ikons in the corner, and fervently implored God to give him strength for his sermon; for that day, after the prescribed prayers and ceremonies were ended, he must take up the fight against Satan, and lead his flock back to the true path. When the hour of divine service arrived, he had the bells tolled especially loud and long, so that their pure metallic clangour might penetrate into the remotest cabins and there proclaim the one true faith of the Church.

But it was as if a frightful curse lay over Pokrovskoe. However clear and invitingly the bells might peal from the church tower, it seemed that they were drowned by the wailing voice of the penitent in his underground vault. The peasants listened only to this devilish voice, and instead of gathering in the church, one by one they descended the dark stairs in Efim Andreevich's yard.

The venerable Father Petr who, for so many years, had been a real pastor in his village, a true father and adviser to his congregation, stood before the ikonostas sad at heart on that festival for which he had made such earnest preparations. Only a few old women and a handful of particularly loyal peasants came to partake of mass; for the rest there were the beggars, the halt, and the blind who regularly appear at every church service. The respected members of the church council, the rich peasants and their wives, the well-dressed girls and lads did not appear, for they were all standing in Efim's courtyard waiting to be admitted to the presence of the diabolical Grisha. Sadly Father Petr celebrated the divine rites; then, waiting until the few faithful sons and daughters of the Church had departed, he knelt in prayer before the ikonostas and implored God to give him light and show him the way whereby he might be enabled to fight Antichrist.

Next day he wakened with a new and unshakable resolution. He would no longer look on in silence and inactivity while the devil took possession of his flock; rather, like a brave soldier of the heavenly kingdom, he would go down into Satan's burrow and conquer him with the weapon of the true word of the Gospel. With flaming eyes he hastened down to the village from his

church on the hill and on to old Efim's house. The peasants, when they saw him coming, thought that they were looking on Saint George himself issuing with fiery courage to do battle with the dragon. A shudder ran over them, for they believed that the decisive hour of the battle between the priest and the prophet of the new faith was at hand.

As Father Petr passed through Efim's yard the peasants who were standing about quickly moved aside to make way for the priest. Though it was long since they had been to church, yet now, when they saw their pastor approaching with firm steps, they felt once more their old reverence for the man of God, and bowed before him in deep humility. But he scarcely heeded these faithless, who had fallen away from the truth to follow a false prophet.

With chest well forward, his little figure erect, head thrown back, and his chin with its reddish beard thrust forward at an acute angle, he stepped boldly up to the cellar stairs. At that moment there was undoubtedly something proud and brave about him, and all his movements betrayed a desire for battle as he disappeared into the deep, dark hole. After he had descended the peasants crowded round and, craning their necks, stared down full of fearful expectation of what was going to happen. An excited whisper passed from lip to lip as the wailing voice from the underground dungeon was suddenly stilled, as if snapped off. The peasants held their breath.

All at once the voice of the penitent cut sharply through the stillness, like the whipping out of a peasant knife. One cry followed another, like knife-thrust on knife-thrust; never had the voice of the holy Grigori seemed so terrifying to the peasants. While they were still listening shudderingly to these sinister sounds, the figure of Father Petr crawled out of the dark cave again. But what a pitiable look the combative priest had now! Broken, shaken, and with a furtive glance, like a poor, beaten cur he slunk as fast as his legs would carry him through the rows of peasants, and hurried over the yard to the road. The voice from below continued to curse in a mighty succession of cries, as if it wished still to pursue the fleeing village priest. Like one bereft of his senses, the little cleric ran through the lanes to the

church on the hill, and did not recover until he was close to the tower, and the devilish voice from the cellar no longer echoed in his ears. Then he stood still, drew a deep breath, and gradually won back his dignity and self-control. What had befallen him? He knew now that in the cellar, as the hideous voice of the penitent ruthlessly bore down on him, Antichrist had gained power over his soul too. He had had to take to flight, to the derision of all the peasants, men and women, who had been witnesses of his humiliation. But he knew that if he had remained a moment longer he, too, would have fallen a victim to the might of the false prophet.

Now, when he thought of his rebellious congregation, Father Petr was considerably more lenient towards their sinful weakness. Nevertheless, he knew that he must not abandon the fight against the devil. As soon as the enchantment of the satanic voice of the penitent had fallen from him he felt that enlightenment had been granted to him, showing him the right way. He hurried into the house, first said a prayer, and then took a quill pen from a drawer and wrote down on a large sheet of paper everything bad he knew about the former life, the actions, and the preaching of the devil-possessed Grigori Efimovich. He also added much he really did not know but which, nevertheless, it seemed to him imperative to say in the interest of the holy cause. Finally, at the end of his report, he declared that beyond doubt the doctrine preached by Grisha was the accursed heresy of the Khlysty, and that Grisha himself was an emissary of that sinful brotherhood. It therefore seemed necessary to him, for the honour of the true faith and for the salvation of the parish of Pokrovskoe, that the authorities should without delay intervene in the most drastic fashion against the propagator of this dangerous doctrine, that is, take legal proceedings against the former carrier, Grigori Efimovich Rasputin. This letter he signed, placed in a large envelope, and sent to the Bishop of Tiumen. Then, with the peaceful feeling of having done the right thing, he awaited the outcome.

It was not long before a commission appeared in Pokrovskoe, with the Very Reverend Lord Bishop at its head. They made the parsonage their headquarters, and one by one all the adherents

to the false doctrine were summoned for examination by the local police. Every single person who was known to Father Petr as having been in the cellar had to appear before the commission, young men and girls, old peasants and white-haired old women.

The young women were examined first, and for this purpose the Lord Bishop sent all the other members of the commission and even the clerk from the room, and questioned the women in a fatherly tone as if he were their confessor. But to his consternation he had to listen to words of the highest praise of the saintly Grisha from every one of them; with glowing cheeks they declared, one after the other, that Grigori Efimovich was a holy and truly God-fearing man and that his words had inspired them with the deepest piety. Even the old peasants and their wives, usually so garrulous, refused to admit that they had heard anything in the cellar which could possibly be construed in an evil sense. In fact, it seemed that the whole village was in a conspiracy to protect the false prophet from the authorities. They all asserted that Grisha spoke divine words, prayed, fasted, mortified his flesh, and served God in the deepest contrition and submission.

The Bishop became impatient, the clerk played nervously with his quill pen, and the other gentlemen of the commission were thinking of rising and declaring the official proceedings at an end. Then Father Petr jumped up from his seat, his whole body shaking with rage, crossed himself hurriedly three times, and cried out in an agitated voice: "The peasants are all under the spell of Antichrist! The spirit of lying speaks from them! Let the high commission convince itself of the blasphemous conduct of this accursed preacher!"

The commission thereupon resolved to send Father Petr to Efim's house accompanied by a policeman. The two men set off and the cleric conducted the official to the entrance of the cellar, and waited while the policeman descended in a dignified, official manner. When he entered the cellar Grisha was again lying on the ground and praying fervently. His devotions were so profound and produced such an effect that the policeman, also a simple, God-fearing peasant, was overcome, fell on his knees on the threshold of the vault, and joined in the prayers of the peni-

tent. Grisha noticed the man who had come "to take proceedings" against him, and who was now devoutly kneeling, went up to him, made the sign of the cross over him, and spoke words more wonderful than the policeman had ever heard. Deeply moved, he seized and kissed the hand of the penitent, which was raised in blessing over him. From his coarse peasant lips burst the words: "Father Grigori, forgive me my sins." On the return journey to the church the policeman spoke only in monosyllables, although the priest walking by his side kept pressing him to say whether he was not convinced of the blasphemous words of Antichrist. He briefly reported to the commission that he had observed nothing suspicious, which statement was duly entered in the minutes. Under the circumstances the Bishop saw no possibility of taking any steps against Grigori Efimovich Rasputin, and confined himself to the resolve that the preacher in the cellar should in future be under official supervision. Thereupon the commission left Pokrovskoe, and Father Petr, to his infinite disappointment, had to acknowledge that practically nothing had happened. The miraculous conversion of the policeman very quickly spread among the peasantry, and served as a further proof of the saintliness of "Father Grigori"—the name which the policeman was the first to apply to the penitent. This designation flew from mouth to mouth. From a peasant lad Grisha had become a "Father," a "starets," and thus the last stage in the canonization of this Russian muzhik was complete.

The fame of the new starets spread far beyond Pokrovskoe and penetrated into the neighbouring governments. Old Efim's house became a place of pilgrimage, and swarms of peasants crowded round the cellar into which Grigori, one of the long line of pious stranniki, had crept, so that from the womb of Mother Earth he might proclaim anew to the world the unadulterated word of the Russian earth, the gospel of the pilgrims, the truth of the "underground men."

Nothing contributed more to Rasputin's prestige than the fact that the authorities were trying to persecute him: had not the spies of the temporal powers from earliest times tried to put God's emissaries in chains, imprison them, and nail them to the cross? In the same way Grisha, now persecuted for his saintly

teaching, became a martyr and a witness to the true word of God.

In the fields and the spinning-rooms, on the benches in front of the house doors, among the fishermen, and in the concealed underground holes of the sectarians, everywhere there was talk of the miracles of the new saint. It was recalled how he had commanded the rain to cease, and how he had saved a nun from the devil's clutches; for none now doubted that the mysterious stranger was Father Grigori.

Three weeks had passed since Grisha had entered on his penance in the cellar; on the twenty-first day he was to appear again among men. Early in the morning of this important day a crowd assembled in Efim's courtyard and in the road before his house, in order to be present at the solemn first appearance of the holy man. They once again heard the wailing cries followed by a joyful psalm; then the voice of the wonderful man ceased, and the crowd stood waiting in a silence charged with emotion; silent and still, they stood expectantly, as in the framework of the door that led to the underground dungeon, appeared in the semi-darkness the stern, lean figure of the penitent. His face was pale and yellowish, as if made of wax, and his nose stood out sharp and prominent from cheeks worn and hollow with prolonged mortifications.

With slow, dignified steps he left the doorway and passed through the waiting crowd to the street. His form spoke of a high seriousness, but the bright glance of his pale blue eyes shone with kindliness, gaiety, and joy. The peasants threw themselves at his feet, kissed his hands and the hem of his kaftan, crying "Father Grigori! Our Saviour!"

He stopped, bent over the devout crowd, blessed them, and said: "I am come to preach to you the joyous message which our Mother Earth taught me down there, the message of salvation through sin."

He slowly proceeded down the long road to the bank of the Tura and, wherever he appeared, men kneeled before him and paid homage to him. And gradually a circle of young girls and women formed about him, surrounding him like a wreath. Again and again he turned to them with a radiant, joyful glance, and blessed them. Then a peasant or two began also to kiss the gar-

ments of the women whom the saint had chosen as his disciples.

On the bank of the river he stopped, turned to the crowd, uttered a solemn prayer, blessed the many who had followed him, and dismissed them; only his women disciples remained.

The peasants, deeply moved, turned to go; and looking back on their homeward way, they saw how the saint, encircled by the host of his disciples, took the road to the forest rising behind the steppe and disappeared into its depths.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE THE HIGH PRIESTS

IN the long corridor leading to the hostel of the monastery the students and professors of the Academy of Theology had for several hours surrounded the Siberian muzhik who, already honoured as a holy man in his own country, had appeared as a simple pilgrim in the capital. They were accustomed even in their leisure hours to dispute ceaselessly about the correct interpretation of a word or a letter in the Holy Scriptures, and they listened with intense interest to the strange peasant's unusual talk.

They had at first regarded him, when he had appeared that morning at early prayers, merely with the passing interest due a wanderer from some far Siberian province. It was no uncommon thing for simple muzhiks to stop at the Petersburg seminary, and make use of its hostel; and the young seminarists put a question or two in passing to this queer-looking codger, with the condescension with which learned students in the higher branches of theology always treat simple people of the lower classes. They did this less for the purpose of learning anything worth knowing than of deriving entertainment from the simplicity of the stranger.

But his answers soon made the seminarists prick up their ears, for they were marked by a clear-cut assurance that could not fail to make an impression. The students put more and more questions; others came along, and soon a growing group was formed; it was joined by teachers as they passed and, in a little while, the peasant was surrounded by a circle of questioners, who showed an ever keener interest in his pertinent answers.

Some of the seminarists were famous for their skill in confusing opponents in theological discussions, and in involving them in contradictions by the subtlety of their argument. One of these

was inspired to show off his art on this simple muzhik, and put to him some very complex questions on the trinity and similar thorny subjects. The audience looked excitedly at the peasant to see how he, who could not possibly be accustomed to the difficult processes of theological speculation, would answer.

Grigori Efimovich Rasputin, the Siberian muzhik, followed the complicated argument with the quiet attentiveness native to the peasant. His bright little eyes regarded the young theologian without the least embarrassment, and he waited until he had finished what he had to say. He was silent for a few seconds, as if turning over in his mind the words he had just heard, and then came his answer. It was quite short, and consisted only of a few clear words; and yet what he said seemed amazing and convincingly right. One by one, other redoubtable disputants tried their luck, and the same fate befell each of them: after they had posed their difficult problems they received from Rasputin a brief but pertinent answer, and the audience had to confess that none of them could have answered the questions so quickly and with such unfailing correctness.

After this interrogation had lasted for a while its character underwent a considerable change. The conceited young seminarists, who had at first merely wished to make fun of the simple peasant, now felt a kind of respectful admiration for the man whom nothing could confuse, and who had a plain, serious, and correct rejoinder to everything. Their questions were no longer put in order to embarrass Rasputin, but because they were really anxious to hear his answer, and receive enlightenment on many problems they themselves did not understand. They became more and more ashamed of their arrogance and conceit and, for the first time, they had a glimmering of the idea that book-learning is not the only path to wisdom. Many of them thought of the Gospels, and remembered that the words of the Holy Scriptures are also simple and plain, exactly like the talk of this peasant. He seemed to know by intuition what they had in vain tried to understand as, night after night, they pored over their books. How was it that he did not, like themselves and even their teachers, get lost in tedious arguments, discussions, and specu-

lations, but was able in a few words to express clearly and unerringly what was important?

So deeply absorbed were the students in their discussion with Grigori Efimovich that they did not notice that their revered teacher, Father Feofan, the rector of the Academy, had quietly joined their group. The frail old man had been observing the pilgrim with his dreamy blue eyes for some time before his well-known voice made itself heard. There was a sudden silence, and the students awaited with excitement the conversation between their rector and the wonderful peasant. Father Feofan addressed the starets with the modesty so characteristic of him: "Just one question if *you** will allow me, little father." He said this in a voice so weak that his words were hardly audible. Rasputin looked up and glanced straightforwardly and good-naturedly at the grey-haired archimandrite. The latter asked for his opinion on a passage in the Scriptures; he was silent for a moment, and then answered without embarrassment, not in the least overawed by the high dignity of the priest. His reply was again brief, clear, and pertinent. The pupils observed with surprise that the answer of the pilgrim had clearly made a strong impression on Father Feofan. He nodded his fine grey head slightly and said: "Yes, little father, that is correct, *you* speak the truth." Then he put further questions, which were always answered in the same way, until at last he came to the difficult problem of sin, and inquired of the starets what he thought about that. "*You* have said, little father," he began in an even shyer tone than before, "that sin is indispensable before God. But how can that be possible when our Saviour and all the great saints of the Orthodox Church have denounced sin as the work of Satan?" This time Grigori answered without a moment's reflection: in his pale eyes had appeared a peculiar expression, a blend of humility, gentleness, slyness, and craft. "Certainly, little father," he said, "our Saviour and the holy fathers have denounced sin, since it is a work of the Evil One. But how can *you* drive out evil, little father,

* Owing to the importance of its use in certain passages, the second person singular has been rendered by the second person plural in italics throughout this translation. (*Translators' note.*)

except by sincere repentance? And how can *you* sincerely repent, if *you* have not sinned?"

He paused a second, and his eyes seemed to have lost all humility; then he continued his speech, but it was no longer quiet and friendly, but noisy, vehement, even reproachful. His words became more and more violent, and finally sounded like the uncontrolled abuse of an angry peasant. "Away with your Scriptures!" he thundered. "Scriptures! Truly, I warn *you*, little father, cease this vain and useless labour so that you may stand before the Lord. Take life as it is, for it alone is given you by God. And let me say this to you. Be not for ever brooding on whence comes sin, on how many prayers a man must say a day, and how long he must fast to escape from sin! Sin, if sin still lurks in you; only in this way can you overcome it! Sin, then you will repent and drive evil from you. So long as you bear sin secretly within you, and fearfully cover it up with fasting, prayer, and eternal discussion of the Scriptures, so long will you remain hypocrites and good-for-nothings, and such are hateful to the Lord. The filth must be expelled, do *you* hear, little father? Only then will your savour be well pleasing to the Lord!"

The students looked anxiously at their teacher; the craziness of these words and the unseemly, disrespectful tone in which they were uttered amazed and troubled them. Some of them became indignant, and would have sharply corrected the muzhik, in spite of his reputation as a saint. But gentle, dreamy Father Feofan remained still, gazing in front of him, as if he were collecting his forces for a reply. So the seminarists, too, kept silent and waited expectantly for what was to happen.

It did not happen. The rector began to speak slowly, started to raise objections to what Rasputin had said; but when he looked at the peasant he stumbled, repeated himself, became confused, and could only stammer out one or two disconnected sentences. His eyelids drooped, he reeled; everything was swimming, and only Rasputin's two bright, glittering eyes seemed to be fixed points. Meanwhile Grigori Efimovich went on talking, and his words beat down on the archimandrite like a shower of stones, so that his whole body began to tremble.

Father Feofan rapidly recovered from his strange attack of

weakness. By the time he had come to himself again, all trace of anything sinister had vanished from Rasputin's aspect. His eyes were clear and friendly, his voice was calm, and his words simple and shrewd, so shrewd that the rector was again reduced to a state of respectful admiration, and fell once more completely under his spell. He resumed his questioning, and the students observed that, after each answer, almost even after each word, he bowed his little grey, bird-like head in approval, saying assentingly: "Yes, little father, that is correct, *you* speak the truth."

Meanwhile, it had become very late, and the archimandrite at last prepared to go to bed. According to his custom he blessed each of his scholars, and then approached the pilgrim and raised his hand. But it seemed as if a stronger power made his hand fall back, and from his lips burst the words: "*You* bless me, little father." Somewhat confused, he hurried off to his room with his quick little steps but, turning round on the stairs, he called to the peasant: "Come to my room early to-morrow, little father. The Venerable Lord Bishop Hermogen will be there, and I should like him to hear *you*."

The students were long in going to bed that night; they discussed the queer incident, and could not still their uneasiness. Many of them were attacked by fearful doubts: what was really the use of all this study and striving, if a simple peasant could come nearer to the truth than they? They felt that the living word had been heard to-day for the first time in this abode of book-learning, and that they must, with shame, confess their powerlessness in face of this living word.

Father Feofan, too, was long troubled by similar thoughts. He could not deny that Grigori Efimovich could explain the meaning of the Gospel words better and more clearly than himself. Was it really true, then, that all acquaintance with commentaries and the most exact theological knowledge was as nothing compared with the direct, God-given intuition of a simple peasant? The old priest struggled in vain to find a way out of his doubts. If Grigori Efimovich was really a saint, what of his blasphemous words about sin? Were these, too, part of divine truth? Or was Rasputin no saint, but an emissary of Satan, sent

to confuse the minds of the pious? The only comfort Father Feofan could find was in his hopes of the coming meeting between Rasputin and Bishop Hermogen: this truly God-fearing and learned man, with his deep knowledge of human nature, would tell him what to think of Grigori Efimovich and his doctrine of sin.

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It was still very early when, next morning, Hermogen, Bishop of Saratov, knocked at the door of his friend Feofan. The rector, who was still agitated over the events of yesterday, began immediately in words tumbling over each other with excitement to tell his visitor about the extraordinary peasant from Tobolsk, who had made such a strangely powerful impression on him. He spoke with such haste that the words in his toothless mouth finally became an incomprehensible mumbling. The Bishop had again and again to interrupt him with: "What was that, little father? Please say it again."

Father Feofan had not told the half of his tale when the door burst open violently and the peasant from Tobolsk broke noisily into the room. Stopping himself with difficulty, he paused a moment on the threshold, looked fixedly round the room, inspected the two men in front of him, sniffed, and went close up to them as if he wished to smell them. He then turned to the ikon-corner, bowed once and a second and third time, making the sign of the cross; afterwards he sprang to the table, stroked the moustache that covered his broadly smirking lips, and cried out heartily: "Here I am, little father."

He next looked at Bishop Hermogen, over whose delicate features played the kindly, comfortable smile so characteristic of him. The gigantic Bishop sat broadly ensconced on the old leather sofa by the window, and observed with amusement the strange peasant, who had fixed his cunning eyes on him.

"Is that *your* bishop *you* spoke of yesterday?" inquired Rasputin.

Somewhat taken aback by this disrespectful form of question, Feofan nodded assent; Grigori Efimovich first rushed up to the frail little rector and next to the good-natured Bishop of Saratov, threw arms round them, and, peasant-fashion, kissed them three

times, first from right to left and then from left to right, so boisterously that both were alarmed.

"Little father, little father," cried the Bishop, laughing good-humouredly, "*you'll* crush me."

From the first Hermogen liked Rasputin: he was delighted with his jolly, animated little eyes, with the genuine sincerity and simplicity that breathed from his whole being, but especially with the piquant and sometimes even slightly coarse flavour of Rasputin's language, which abounded in mother-wit and peasant slyness, and which, with its beautiful, deep tones, and its distinctive Siberian dialect, seemed particularly charming to the Bishop. Grigori, too, from the start felt sympathetic to this comfortably smiling man. The two found the right tone immediately, and a few minutes later they were talking away as unconstrainedly as if they had been old friends. Grigori suddenly seized the Bishop's hand, pressed it affectionately, and cried "I like *you*." Hermogen burst out laughing, much cheered by this spontaneous proof of friendship, while gentle little Father Feofan again made vain attempts to bring the conversation round to sacred subjects. For the rector earnestly desired to introduce his episcopal friend to the pilgrim's singular capacity for expounding the Gospels, and to hear his verdict on it.

The Bishop was not so sensitive to direct impressions, and not so easily carried away by enthusiasm as the rector; but his benevolent mind and serenity of spirit brought him all the more quickly into touch with the Siberian peasant. He did not immediately succumb to admiration for the "new saint," but none the less, his liking for this vital peasant was at least as great as the rapture of gentle Father Feofan. During his talk with Grisha he was more and more captivated by his clarity and sagacity; but what really attracted him to Grigori was not so much his theological skill as the direct sensuous effect of his words.

Hermogen was a militant servant of the Church and a great preacher; he at once saw how great an influence Rasputin might exercise, and how valuable his co-operation might be in the service of the Orthodox cause. It seemed to the Bishop that the clergy, in their fight against the tendency towards complete Westernization then prevailing in Russian politics, needed just

such a man as this Grigori Efimovich who, with his native and original speech, so exactly embodied the best type of muzhik. As Hermogen listened to the pilgrim he was hard at work thinking how he could best arrange to secure this impressive, fundamentally Russian personality for his political purposes. When Grigori Efimovich had finished his discourse Hermogen, his mind full of such schemes, turned to Father Feofan with the remark that they must at once take the starets to the famous monk-priest Iliodor. Father Feofan had not yet grasped the Bishop's far-reaching projects, and had merely noticed what extraordinary pleasure he found in this peculiar Siberian peasant. At the same time, he felt somewhat disappointed, for he could not help thinking that Grigori was to-day making a less favourable impression than he had made yesterday; in particular, the rough manner in which he talked to Hermogen offended the rector. But when Hermogen invited him and Grigori Rasputin to go with him to Iliodor, he suppressed his disappointment, and followed the other two with little steps, quiet and gentle as was his wont, to visit the monk-priest.

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Iliodor, the monk-priest of Tsarytsin, or, to give him his real name, Sergei Trufanov, had the reputation of being the greatest church orator in Russia, and his sermons were beginning to surpass in fame even those of John of Kronstadt. He was a tall, thin monk with wild, burning eyes, whose voice, though sharp and unpleasant, had a compelling power. On account of his austere life and his fanatical zeal in the faith, he had been nicknamed "the Knight of the Heavenly Kingdom." As a personality he was powerful, feared, and at the same time idolized; thousands of muzhiks flocked to him, and even the Tsar was accustomed to listen reverently to his words. When, at Epiphany, he descended from his monastery to the banks of the Volga to conduct the time-honoured festival of the Church, under a white baldaquin adorned with flowers and surrounded by glittering ikons, the crowds fell on their knees and, as with one voice, broke into sacred songs. Behind Iliodor came the monks of his monastery, like Greek charioteers standing in chariots to which girls and old women had harnessed themselves. As this triumphal

procession approached, the enraptured crowd ecstatically acclaimed the "Knight of the Heavenly Kingdom."

Iliodor had wished to build a great monastery, but the funds of his parish were inadequate. He ascended a hill in the town and addressed the people: "Whoever has a plank he does not need," ran his appeal, "let him bring me that plank; whoever has a rusty nail, let him give that nail; and let him who possesses nothing, sacrifice himself and help to delve earth!" As a result of this sermon the whole population contributed tiles, timber, and other building materials, and hundreds of volunteer workers offered their services; and very soon there rose from the soil, in a formerly disreputable part of the town, a great monastery with a large hall, which put many another Russian monastery in the shade.

This successful effort added appreciably to the fame and power of Iliodor. Soon the new church would not hold the crowds that flocked from near and far to hear sermons of the monk-priest. Iliodor then hit upon a curious plan. He appealed to his disciples to dig cellars under the monastery, and to shovel together the earth thus removed, so as to form an artificial hill, a "Mount Tabor." His intention was to build on this hill a "transparent tower" overgrown with flowers and, from this height, to address his "sermons on the Mount" to the assembled multitude. This curious plan was immediately put into effect, and Iliodor's adherents, especially the famous boxer and heavyweight champion, Saikin, began to delve and collect the earth. "Mount Tabor," however, was never completed.

As a strict and zealous adherent of the Orthodox faith, Iliodor became first a supporter and then a champion of extreme nationalistic pan-slavism and monarchism. In innumerable sermons he supported the absolute autocracy of the Tsar. He joined the "Union of the True Russian People," that powerful and dangerous association of political reactionaries. His monarchism was, however, shot with popular ideas of a peasant communism, in which the Tsar alone should be master, and the whole people, without distinction of rank or class, should be brothers with equal rights. Although he championed that absolute power of the Tsar, at the same time he fought against all

other class privileges, and this brought him great popularity.

His patriotism did not prevent him from inveighing against bad government officials, governors, and administrators; indeed, he particularly enjoyed doing so, in order to show that not the Tsar but his servants were to blame, if everything were not for the best in the Empire. Often he preferred violent charges against the authorities; but his great reputation as a "true champion of the monarchist idea" protected him from prosecution. His speeches were of an unrestrained, filthy, almost heretical coarseness, and this earned him the nickname of the "curser." He was particularly violent in his denunciation of the "diabolical corruption of morals," that pestilence with which, according to him, the intelligentsia, officials, and Jews, in their coquetting with the West, were infecting the uncorrupted Russian people.

The sermons of this "Russian Savonarola" became every day more gross and outrageous: first he would attack the governor, and shout that it would have been better for him to have stayed on his estates and milked the cows; then he would thunder against the chief of police, and he was never tired of declaring that the administration of the Tsarytsin district was in Satan's clutches. When his attacks became intolerable, Kurlov, one of the chief police officials, tried to call him to order as considerately and circumspectly as possible. He sent for Iliodor, and submitted to him the report of one of his speeches, in which he had openly incited to resistance against the commands of the authorities. He asked him whether the text had not been somewhat distorted. Iliodor, however, replied proudly and defiantly that the document corresponded, word for word, with his sermon, and that he saw no necessity for withdrawing a single one of his utterances. Kurlov timidly tried to point out that such incitements to violence could not be suffered; whereupon the monk-priest turned to him with a voice of thunder, abused him, and declared that his one aim was to protect the people and the Tsar from incapable and treacherous administrators.

The authorities tried to take steps against Iliodor through the agency of the Holy Synod; but the monk refused to appear and justify himself before his spiritual superiors. He barricaded himself in the church of his monastery, from there sent out letters

of invective against the Synod, and called upon his followers to defend him. So violent a popular movement began in his favour that no one dared to proceed against him.

After that Iliodor carried on a veritable reign of terror in Tsarytsin. During Lent he went about the town at night in his black cowl, appeared at masked balls and drove away the guests, forced his way into gambling rooms, and visited brothels. There he stared at the women in silence, but so threateningly that they fled into the street with hysterical cries of fear, and for a long time did not dare to return to the house. Next day articles appeared in the newspapers in which Iliodor described his "impressions" during his nocturnal expeditions, and gave the names of all the "honourable citizens" he had met in disreputable places.

He nourished a particular hatred for the intellectuals, whom he always called "Jews," without any inquiry about their faith. On one occasion he had a big doll in a Jewish caftan carried in a procession, and it was afterwards burned with great solemnity. Close to the entrance of the monastery church he had built, was a large picture of the Last Judgment, in which Jewish lawyers and journalists were depicted in the forefront of the sinners condemned to everlasting punishment in Hell.

From time to time, voices were heard declaring that Iliodor was nothing but a "pusher," who would do anything to make himself popular; but the masses revered him unreservedly and exalted him as a "Knight of the Heavenly Kingdom." His huge following was devoted to him; it consisted of resolute, brave men and fanatical women who were ready to do anything at the command of their leader.

When the fame of Iliodor spread from Tsarytsin to St. Petersburg, the Imperial couple summoned him to Tsarskoe Selo. During his stay there he formed a friendship with Bishop Hermogen and with the Archimandrite Feofan, the confessor of the Empress. After his visit he returned, loaded with honours, to his home, where he was now able to play the part of a despotic ruler.

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When Bishop Hermogen, accompanied by Father Feofan and Grigori Efimovich, knocked at the monk-priest's cell, he received no answer. He opened the door carefully and quietly, and the

three men peered into the half-darkened room. The monk lay in one corner of it, where innumerable ikons hung, with little oil lamps burning before them. He was absorbed in profound prayer, and had bowed his head until it was touching the ground, so that his visitors could see only his hindquarters sticking up in the air, with the stiff monastic robe standing out like a board; below, appeared the broad soles of his gigantic boots. The unusual picture made by the praying monk strongly impressed the three visitors, and although they really had urgent business to discuss with Iliodor, they simultaneously fell on their knees and joined in his prayers.

Gentle Father Feofan had had such years of practice that he could at once automatically become absorbed in deep devotion as soon as the golden light of an oil lamp fell on his eyes; so now he let his eyelids drop and was immediately in a state of devotional ecstasy. But good Bishop Hermogen could not on the moment attain to the proper importance of his mission, and was impatient for Iliodor to finish his prayers, so that he could discuss with him the newly discovered champion of the faith.

But Iliodor did nothing of the kind. Although he must have observed the arrival of his visitors, he behaved as though he thought himself quite alone, and continued to pray unmoved. Under other circumstances Bishop Hermogen would have been the first to admire this strict, even fanatical, zeal in prayer; but this time he felt in his heart that there had been enough of piety. The obstinate devotion of the monk gradually approached maliciousness; and the great Iliodor was malicious, as Hermogen had had frequent occasion to convince himself. But however that might be, there could be no thought of disturbing the monk's devotional exercises, and the Bishop had no resource but to go on kneeling, raging in his heart.

Rasputin was neither restless nor impatient; in his soul he had brought with him to St. Petersburg the peace of the infinite steppes of Siberia; he knew how to wait. Nothing disturbed his equanimity, in which respect he really had something of a "holy temper." The whole position even gave him a sincere pleasure. He could examine the monk closely, with the serenity native to the peasant, and estimate his importance and value. The fact

that he had seen the redoubted Iliodor for the first time in an unusual situation and attitude was, as Rasputin at once felt instinctively, an important advantage, for he would never lose the grotesque picture of the suppliant with his cassock standing stiffly out and his enormous soles exposed, whatever awe-inspiring and superior attitudes he might afterwards assume.

Grisha the peasant was, in any case, accustomed to encounter the most important personages with natural unconcern; this time he had been particularly confident from the start. But at a moment when Iliodor finished a prayer, he felt that the monk's praying had lasted long enough and, to the infinite dismay of the gentle Archimandrite and Bishop Hermogen, he rose, crossed himself, and stepped up to him, saying: "Brother . . . brother." The "curser," furious at anyone's having the audacity to interrupt his devotions, leapt up precipitately and glared at Rasputin with angry, blazing eyes. Father Feofan and the Bishop, terrified to death, waited for the awful outburst to come. Iliodor raised his arm and drew a breath before loosing a flood of terrible invective on the foolhardy intruder, when he felt the unknown peasant lay his right hand on his shoulder and saw the pale little eyes, smiling good-humouredly, turn on him and take his own glance captive. And a voice sounded very melodious, but at the same time strong as steel, saying: "*You* pray well, brother."

Iliodor stared at his visitor in amazement, and this amazement was further increased when the peasant went on in all innocence: "Now cease persecuting God with *your* prayers; even He wants a rest sometimes. Come, those two there," pointing to Feofan and Hermogen, "have something to discuss with *you*."

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Later, whenever Iliodor recalled this first meeting with Rasputin, there stirred in his heart the same confused feeling he had felt then, the same wrath, which had made him start up like a wounded animal, that anyone should dare to disturb him at his devotions, the same agitation under the glance of this man who displayed so little respect for him, this dirty peasant with his imperturbable assurance and friendly smile. When he remembered that Grisha had from the beginning addressed him

with the familiar *you* and called him "brother," a wave of anger always broke over him afresh; but at the same time he experienced the same queer state of impotence that had then overpowered him like a paralysing spell. Something terrible happened to the monk-priest in Rasputin's presence. The invective, the divine power such as none but the great prophets of old had possessed before him, seemed to vanish whenever he felt the diabolical pale eyes of this peasant resting on him. He had struggled in vain to find words, and had exerted all his strength to produce at least one of his favourite formulas of execration; but, instead of this, he had been silent, and had even in the end clasped in friendly fashion the rough hand which this disrespectful peasant had offered him with a peaceful smile.

This divided state of mind, a blend of anger, disgust, impotence, fear, and admiration, Iliodor never lost. On that first day, when he sat with Feofan and Hermogen and discussed Grisha, a force he could not explain impelled him not only openly to share their enthusiasm, but even to fan the flame of Feofan's childish faith in the saintliness of Rasputin, and of the worthy Hermogen's optimistic conviction of the political importance of the peasant. Although, at this meeting, Iliodor could not for an instant overcome his repulsion and distrust, he yet approved the plan of introducing Grisha to the committee of the "true Russian people," and was even a passionate advocate of the idea. He felt quite clearly that this ugly lout of a peasant was utterly distasteful to him, and his instinct warned him of danger threatening; but whenever he began to talk about Grigori Efimovich it was as if his tongue were governed by an alien power, and he always declared that he was a real saint, a God-sent champion of the true faith.

So it happened that, although it was the venerable Father Feofan and the highly respected Bishop Hermogen who introduced Rasputin to the Central Committee of the "true Russian people," as an important fellow-combatant, the decision to accept him was brought about solely by the enthusiastic speeches of Iliodor. There was more than one incredulous person, more than one cynical sceptic, among the members of the Central Committee, and these would never have been convinced of the saintli-

ness of Rasputin by Feofan and Hermogen alone. They had listened to their explanations in silence, shaking their heads, and Hermogen, to his dismay, had to note that the case of the Tobolsk peasant was not particularly favourable.

But then the "great curser" rose and, under the influence of his persuasive eloquence, the atmosphere immediately underwent a complete change. In all that followed, Iliodor had to confess that during this session he was, in his inmost heart, of the opinion of the head-shaking sceptics; nevertheless, he jumped up furiously, thundered at the doubters, and declared that even the "true Russian people" were plainly corrupted by the devilish spirit of the West, by that disintegrating search for enlightenment which was trying to destroy true faith in God and in the holiness of the Russian nation. With flaming eyes he told Rasputin's opponents that their patriotism was no better than that of the impious Jews, lawyers, and journalists who believed in nothing, and wanted to drag everything through the mire. With uplifted hands the great preacher bewailed the fact that the reign of Antichrist was at hand, since even the Union of the True Russian People had succumbed to the influence of scepticism. "Woe, woe, for poor holy Russia!"

After a brief pause Iliodor proceeded to the practical side of his proposals, appealed to the "clear political reason" of his audience, and tried to convince them how important it was for the aims and objects of the Union to enlist Grigori Rasputin as a working tool. He argued that the Union must have the support of the people in its political efforts, for that was the best means of successfully stemming the advance of the ideas of freedom and scepticism from the West. In his opinion they must show that the Russian muzhik, as representative of the "God-fearing people," was the embodiment of the highest form of humanity; and Grisha, the Siberian peasant, was the very man to convince everyone, by his simple but profound words, of the muzhik's wisdom and heaven-inspired clear-sightedness.

Iliodor explained to his political friends how the greatest national thinkers, a Dostoevski, even a Tolstoi (otherwise an impious heretic), had long preached that the speech of the muzhik was the expression of the most profound thought, to be com-

pared for grandeur only with the words of the Gospels. If the Siberian peasant, Rasputin, was revered as a saint, it signified nothing but obeisance to the uncorrupted divine power dwelling in the people. By the recognition of Grisha's saintly life, the holiness of the people, of the peasantry, and thereby of the true Russian idea, was bound to be confirmed. If supreme wisdom and marvellous enlightenment were to be found in the talk of a simple Siberian peasant, what was left for Western civilization to do? And what an advantage it would be to be able, when a political decision had to be taken, to appeal to the will of a holy man from whose mouth God himself had spoken! Everyone who did not wish to be a rebel against his religion and his country would have at once to recognize as right any policy that had been approved and blessed by Grigori Efimovich.

These and many similar statements were made by Iliodor at the meeting, and his words were forcible, emphatic, and convincing as they had seldom been before. When he had finished his discourse he could see that all those present were affected by it, and were thoroughly convinced of Rasputin's importance.

As Iliodor returned to his place another cleric rose, the Priest Vostorgov; like all the rest he had been overwhelmed by Iliodor's speech and, in a confused fashion, he humbly expressed the thanks and admiration of the meeting. He assured Iliodor that the Committee was absolutely convinced by his arguments, and would make its future decisions in accordance with his wishes. He begged to add on his own account that, during a propaganda tour through the Tobolsk government at the time of the last elections, he himself had arrived at a conviction that they must attract specially gifted peasants for political work. He had submitted a detailed report to the Central Committee at the time, but it had evidently not been thought of sufficient value. Now he thanked the venerable gentlemen, the Archimandrite Feofan, Bishop Hermogen, and especially the highly esteemed priest Iliodor, for having returned to these ideas and given them the full weight of their support.

While Vostorgov was speaking Iliodor's face visibly changed colour, and everything seemed to be swimming before his eyes; as this stupid, garrulous priest endorsed his own arguments

Iliodor felt clearly that he was of exactly the opposite opinion, that he believed Grisha to be a hypocrite, a sham saint, a clod of a dirty peasant. What devil had driven him to speak against his own intuitions? As he looked at that blockhead of a Vostorgov consequentially agreeing with him, and bowing deferentially towards him, the monk-priest was seized with a fit of furious rage.

But at the same instant, another member of the Committee rose and intervened in the discussion of the case of Rasputin, the peasant from the Tobolsk government. The new speaker was a distinguished advocate, and a stout member of the Union, who had already done it many important services. He began, nevertheless, in a diffident and modest tone, for he was well aware of the difficulty and danger, after the speeches of Iliodor and Vostorgov, of not joining in the universal enthusiasm for Grigori Efimovich. He, however, felt it his duty to bring forward certain objections, and to warn the meeting of the danger of the project; but he did this in such a low and shrinking voice and with so many reservations, that his speech apparently passed almost unnoticed; only the "curser" followed his words with strained attention. As the shrewd and discreet advocate said that they ought seriously to consider whether this peasant would not later involve them in many difficulties, and whether they would not have cause to repent precipitate action in the affair, Iliodor drew a deep sigh of relief, as one saved. With each of the speaker's words his heart grew lighter and more at ease; he rejoiced that at last, in this unwholesome atmosphere of religious enthusiasm, the voice of reason had been heard, that one man had kept his head clear and given open utterance to his own secret fears.

"You expect advantage from this peasant Rasputin," the advocate had said warningly; "but I believe that in the final result he will do nothing but harm." Yes, that was the truth, the liberating truth at last! Iliodor rose to support the speaker cordially. But immediately he again fell under the spell of that devilish power which forced him to serve "the spirit of lies" to his own destruction, and not only not avert the fatality he clearly discerned, but even hasten it. With grim visage, Iliodor began to

thunder at the unassuming advocate, reproaching him with "Western scepticism," "unpatriotic ideas," and "lack of understanding of the holy Russian people." In the last resort the world would be saved from ruin only by the holy Russian people, and not by accursed advocates, journalists, and all the rest of the Jews!

The meeting ended, as was inevitable, in a complete success. Father Feofan and Bishop Hermogen were radiant with joy, and Hermogen at once proceeded to work on the little Archimandrite, as the Empress's confessor, to bring the new starets to Tsarskoe Selo. Only Iliodor was unapproachable and angry, and his always alarming insolence that evening assumed even more unpleasant forms than usual.

CHAPTER V

THE FATEFUL IDYLL OF TSARSKOE SELO

"SUNSHINE" was the pet name, with its suggestion of sunny gaiety, that had been given to the young Princess Alix of Hesse before she became Empress of Russia, as the consort of Nikolai II. The name stuck to her, and her husband hardly ever called her anything else.

As soon as the Tsar had finished the burdensome business of State, he hastened to his Alix like a young husband very much in love, as if the moment to return to her and their peaceful and beloved home could not come too soon. He found the duties his position imposed upon him unpleasant and irksome; for hours he sat discontentedly over his papers, signed documents, studied ministerial reports, and made marginal notes on them; he endured the necessary audiences with boredom, and was overjoyed when they did not last too long. His official life was one long struggle with the mountain of documents on his desk, which swelled alarmingly, if he even once neglected to discharge his regular prescribed task.

Since his accession to the throne, day had succeeded day in an alternation between the unpleasant hours devoted to the business of Government and the pleasant hours of family life. The Tsaritsa, too, in all the long years of her marriage, had never been able to reconcile herself to the fact that she must be separated from her husband for a few hours. If Government business took longer than usual she became impatient and longed for his return. She almost always kept to her pale mauve boudoir, surrounded by a mass of flowers; she either lay reading on a couch, wrote letters in her rapid hand, occupied herself with needlework, or, in later years, talked with her friend Ania Vyrubova, and told her of her life with the Tsar. She talked of him and thought of him practically all the time, for, even in hours of

absence, she wished to be with her husband in spirit at least.

Then when hurrying steps sounded in the corridor, and the crystals of the chandelier began to tinkle, she jumped up, as excited as a girl, the blood rising to her cheeks. The doors flew open, and the Tsaritsa, joyfully and with shining eyes, ran to meet her smiling husband. They would talk for hours, happy and care-free, about their children, their joint plans, excursions and walks, and all the thousand trifles that make up the conversation of two people in love with one another.

It sometimes happened that, while the Empress was receiving visitors, a slow whistle like the note of a bird was heard in the next room. Alexandra would rise, her face one burning blush, shyly remark that the Emperor was calling her, and, excusing herself to her guests, disappear into the adjoining room. She never failed to obey the call.

Every hour not spent together was a torment and a weariness. When the Tsar, after several years of marriage, was for the first time obliged to leave his wife for a considerable period, in order to visit the King of Italy at Racconigi, Alexandra shut herself up in her rooms and would admit no one, not even her children. She did not recover her spirits until his return, and her one complaint then was that the reunion took place in the presence of the whole Court, which prevented her from giving free rein to her happiness.

Only twice in the course of twenty-three years was the harmony of this marriage slightly disturbed by misunderstandings. The first time was when gossip reached the Emperor's ears that the Empress was not quite indifferent to the handsome Prince Orlov. There were many people at Court who never tired of insinuations of that kind, and the fact that General Orlov spent nearly every evening in the royal apartments, playing billiards for hours with the Emperor, gave fresh food for rumours. Even after lung trouble had sent Orlov suddenly off to Egypt, where he died soon after, it was for a long time impossible to silence these evil tongues.

Although the Tsar had never seriously doubted the loyalty of his wife, the Tsaritsa at one time became very jealous of her friend Ania, and believed that she had infringed on her most

sacred wifely rights. Anna Vyrubova had been simple and honest enough to confess to her one day that a feeling of love for the Tsar was beginning to germinate in her heart, quite against her will. The confession, innocent though it was, turned the excitable Alexandra against her friend for a time, and even caused her to speak disparagingly of the "traitress" in family letters.

Such trifling misunderstandings, however, passed as quickly as they came, and could not permanently trouble the happiness of the two. Both the Tsar and the Tsaritsa quickly saw the folly of their suspicions, and their former harmony was completely restored.

Never, not even during these transient storms, had a single unkind word passed between husband and wife; they were always inspired by the tenderest consideration for one another, and avoided hurting each other even by a glance. From their marriage right up to the tragic end they shared, their love for each other showed no decline, and they lived together like a newly married couple.

This unclouded family happiness is seen most clearly in the diaries in which Nikolai used to make notes every night. Their pages tell of wonderful quiet hours, of the joy of watching the children grow up, and of gratitude for the "complete and boundless happiness" of his marriage. From the start the young imperial couple had withdrawn into the simplest and most modest surroundings possible, for they both loathed the magnificence of the great State apartments. From the date of their first visit Tsarskoe Selo became especially dear to the imperial pair, and they soon moved from the capital into permanent residence there. They sat together evening after evening, played with the children, or turned over illustrated books, magazines, and photograph albums. The Tsar grumbled every time his State duties kept him longer than usual away from his wife:

"It is a pity that business takes up so much time, when I so long to spend every hour with her."

"This forenoon I had to deal with reports again, but in the afternoon I walked with Alix in the garden. We cannot bear to be parted from one another."

"As I was busy in the forenoon I did not see Alix at all till

lunch time. But in the afternoon we drove to Pavlovsk again and admired the beautiful sunset. In the evening, after tea, I read aloud to her for a time."

"I received Durnovo, Fredericks, Richter, and Avelan. Then I drove to the Academy of Sciences where the ceremonial annual meeting was being held. It was not interesting, but lasted not quite an hour, so that I was home again by two o'clock. I went with my dear little wife to the Islands; the evening was wonderful and the excursion very pleasant. We did not get home till half-past eleven."

In the first years of her marriage Alexandra used to intersperse the Tsar's jottings with notes and sentences, mostly expressions of love in English, which overflow with tenderness and heartfelt devotion.

"To-day I had a lot of free time," writes the Tsar, "as I had hardly any reports to read. We lunched and dined alone. I cannot describe how happy our life is alone together in beautiful Tsarskoe." The Tsaritsa adds in English: "Your little wife worships you."

"My happiness knows no bounds," remarks the Emperor another time. "It is only with reluctance that I leave Tsarskoe, so dear to us both. Here, for the first time since our marriage, we have been alone, and lived together quite undisturbed." And the Tsaritsa adds: "Never did I believe that there could be such utter happiness in this world, such a feeling of unity between two mortal beings. I LOVE YOU—these three words have my life in them."

For the most part the Emperor writes of State business quite superficially in his notebooks, in order to devote more time to the happy hours of his private life. A brief enumeration of the people to whom he has given audience is frequently followed by cries like:

"I am indescribably happy with Alix."

"It is inexpressibly delightful to be able to be together day and night in peace, undisturbed by anyone. We have our meals *à deux* in the corner room and go to bed early."

"I thank God daily with all my soul for the happiness He has given me. No man on earth could desire greater or fairer bliss."

When Alexandra was not sitting with her husband or Anna Vyrubova in her boudoir, she was sure to be found with the children. Her maternal solicitude was so great that she hated to leave the nursery, and often even received official visits there. On one occasion, when the head of the Court Chancery had urgent business to discuss with her and a number of documents to submit for her signature, the Empress received him holding the little Grand Duchess Olga on one arm and rocking the cradle of the new-born Tatiana with her other hand.

When at last, after years of fruitless hopes, a son was born, Alexandra took even more pains with him than over the earlier children; although she had an excellent and reliable nurse for the little Alexei in the person of Vishniakova, and although there were other nurses employed at Tsarskoe Selo, the Empress herself undertook every duty, however trifling: she bathed, dressed, and tended her son, taught him to speak his first words, and played with him for hours. In later years, as the children gradually grew up, Alexandra herself superintended their education; she bent with them over their books and exercises, helped them with the tasks set by the house tutors, and prepared them for their lessons with Fräulein Schneider, Mr. Gibbs, and M. Gilliard. She did needlework with her daughters and, while they were little, sewed dolls' clothes for them; later she loved to take part in the preparations for little domestic parties.

The Emperor also loved to play with his children, and he too spent much time in their company. He had one of the great marble halls at Tsarskoe Selo set aside as a playroom for them, and had a long parquet slide constructed there. Here Nikolai enjoyed himself with his daughters and, even in times of serious political unrest, he would spend an hour or two almost every day rushing down the smooth wooden slide with the children.

The sovereign's day generally began with a short walk after breakfast, followed by the reception of the regular visitors. As a rule, the Emperor summoned his ministers but seldom, and generally received their reports in writing. But almost every day there were some high officials or military dignitaries who had asked for an audience, and whom the Emperor could not refuse to receive. These conversations bored him horribly, and he was

glad when one o'clock arrived, at which time he lunched in the company of the Empress and the officers on duty. This was usually followed by a long walk in the Park of Tsarskoe Selo, generally in Alix's company, but sometimes with his elder daughters; on these occasions they would pick flowers and lie on the grass. In the afternoon they often drove or made excursions by motor-boat; and the Emperor frequently took his gun with him and shot crows. Then at last came the hour at which the whole family assembled round the tea-table. Then work again, for the Tsar must spend an hour or two with the papers piled up on his desk. Dinner was at eight o'clock.

At nine o'clock, when dinner was over, the Tsáritsa went to the Tsesarevich's room to say evening prayers with him. On her return, and while the Tsar retired to his study for a little, she would often play duets with Ania, generally Beethoven or Tschaikovski's sonatas. The Emperor was frequently attracted by the sound of the music and would creep in on tiptoe to listen. He stood quietly behind the performers, only the delicate smell of the inevitable cigarette betraying his presence to them. If no official business remained the Emperor liked to sit in his wife's room and read aloud to her and Ania from the works of Tolstoi, Turgenev, Dostoevski, Gogol, or Chekhov until finally, about midnight, tea was served once more and the royal couple retired.

Life at Tsarskoe Selo was, as a rule, interrupted only twice a year by holidays: in winter the imperial family went to the Crimea for a few weeks, to their country house at Livadia, and in summer they almost always went on a cruise to the Finnish islands. On these holidays their life was even quieter than usual, for then State visits and official business practically ceased, and the Emperor could devote himself entirely to his family. At Livadia the day was spent in long walks in the quiet countryside. The Tsar had successfully prevented Livadia from being linked up with the rest of the world by a railway, because he did not wish to spoil the idyllic seclusion of this glorious district. The glittering white imperial castle lay amid rose-covered hills and slopes, with a magnificent distant view of the dark blue waters of the sea and the snow-covered mountain peaks. The

imperial family would set out early in the morning, armed with provisions, for long excursions in the woods lasting all day. They would light a fire and cook the mushrooms they had gathered, and the imperial couple spent whole days of delicious idleness with their children.

At other times they took long rides or bathed. The Emperor loved all kinds of physical exercise; he was a splendid rower, walker, swimmer, cyclist, and tennis-player. Tennis, in particular, was one of his greatest pleasures, and he played it with passion. He could spend many hours a day on the courts, and he played as if it was the most important thing in the world. The loss of a game seriously upset him, which often put his partners, especially Anna Vyrubova, in a very awkward situation. He hated to be distracted by conversation during the game. The Tsar was also fond of shooting; his diaries are full of notes about the most trifling details of his shoots and the size of the bags.

Life in the Finnish islands was as peaceful as in the Crimea. They crossed the Gulf of Finland on the imperial yacht "Standard," and plunged into the maze of uninhabited rocky islands, where the days were spent in excursions into the woods, in rowing, bathing, and swimming. The family visited the charming wild spots in the little islands, arranged picnics, climbed about the rocks, and gathered berries. Meanwhile, the children played with the sailors who had been detailed for the purpose. In later years, when the Grand Duchesses were grown-up young ladies, innocent little flirtations developed between them and the elegant officers of the crew, on which the parents looked with good-natured smiles, and over which the girls were heartily chaffed. In the evenings they all sat on deck round the tea-table, while the Emperor puffed contentedly at his cigarette, told stories of his young days, or chatted about the trifling events of the day. Under the spell of this idyllic atmosphere he once exclaimed happily that he felt as if the whole party were one big family.

The quiet peace of life was broken only by the unwelcome appearance twice a week of a royal messenger, who brought the Emperor a mass of important documents which had to be dealt

with. Then the sovereign was forced to spend a day at his desk, until State business was finished, and he was free to return to the bosom of his family again.

So the life of the Emperor and Empress, whether at Tsarskoe Selo, on their estate of Livadia, or in the Finnish islands, passed year after year in tranquil happiness. When the great Revolution broke out, and the Emperor was deposed and had to leave Tsarskoe Selo with his family, Alexandra wrote to her friend: "Dearest, how inexpressibly hard it is to leave here, to part from this dear house, now so desolate, our home in which we have spent twenty-three happy years."

And later in Tobolsk, with an uncertain and menacing fate before them, the one consolation of the imperial family, almost their one topic of conversation, was the remembrance of their indescribably happy life together. "The past is lost," writes the Empress to Anna Vyrubova from Tobolsk, "but I thank God for all that has happened, for the rich treasure of glorious memories of which no one can rob me."

For in the whole of the great Russian Empire there was perhaps no other woman who was more thankful for her lot, who regarded her quiet, almost middle-class life among her family as a greater happiness, than the Empress of Russia. To her the existence she had lived, in the narrowest surroundings, with her husband, their children, and her one faithful friend, Ania, was "quite the greatest happiness on earth. . . ."

* * * * *

And yet: in those twenty-three years of intimacy a terrible tragedy was slowly gathering over the heads of the royal couple, so wrapped up in love and family happiness. While the Tsar was impatiently waiting for the last of the wearisome visits and reports so that he could hasten back to the arms of his beloved Alix, while he was rushing down the slide with his children amid joyous laughter, or looking for mushrooms in the woods, or chattering cosily in the evenings about the trifling events of the day on the deck of his yacht, during all his games of tennis, his motor-boat excursions, and his shooting parties, the dark cloud that portended the storm in which he and his family were to be destroyed and the Russian Empire ruined, was slowly gather-

ing. From the very beginning this "sunny happiness" bore in it, like a pestilence, the seed of inevitable catastrophe. Even the love of these two people, their absorption in each other that isolated them from the world, was overshadowed by a dark fatality: nay, perhaps the spirit of destruction lay more heavily, oppressively, and calamitously over this quiet, uneventful, petit-bourgeois idyll of wedlock than over anything else in their lives. Perhaps this perfect "freedom from care" was itself the disease, perhaps a cruel fate was pursuing its course deceptively, hiding corruption under the mask of happiness.

The realm of this innocent royal couple had long been advancing to ruin, almost imperceptibly, but surely, and the very essence of this Empire, the soul, life, and disposition of the nation, were already infected with disease when Nikolai ascended the throne.

The middle-class "family idyll" of Tsarskoe Selo was, from its first moment to its terrible end, involved in an endless chain of tragic accidents, war, peril, sickness, murder, and catastrophes; these people, in their apparent freedom from care, trembled with a ceaseless, tormenting fear that knew no end. From early youth, the continual terror of new menaces and dangers and fresh blows of fate plunged both Emperor and Empress into a kind of melancholy. The Emperor, always prone to superstition, had from the very beginning of his reign the crushing feeling that nothing that he undertook could be crowned with success, since he was born on the day of Job, the great sufferer. Moreover, a century before, the holy monk and prophet, Serafim of Saratov, had prophesied that, in the reign of the Tsar who would be ruling at the beginning of the twentieth century, evils of all kinds would befall the country: poverty, war, and rebellion. The Emperor Nikolai believed this prophecy, and faced every undertaking with suspicion, fear, and doubt.

The events of his early youth had also been such as to confirm this gloomy belief in an inevitable fate: his boyhood had been shadowed by the frightful end of his grandfather, the Emperor Alexander II, who was blown to pieces by a bomb. It was this murder by a nihilist that made Nikolai's father Tsar and

himself Tsesarevich, so that his accession as heir to the throne was marked by a bloody outrage.

When, later, happiness in love seemed to beckon to the Tsesarevich, this too was immediately darkened by evil influences: the young Princess Alix of Hesse, whom it was his dearest wish to make his bride, displeased his mother from the beginning, and the old Empress did her best to prevent the betrothal. It was not until four years after the Princess's visit to Russia that, in the presence of the dying Emperor, his mother abandoned her opposition, and Alix was invited to the Crimea, where Alexander III, in his last illness, received her with all due ceremony as his daughter-in-law and the future Empress. But the young couple had no time to enjoy their happiness. The last weeks of their betrothal were spent in the oppressive atmosphere of a house in which the old Emperor lay dying over the rooms of the young couple. Then, when the inevitable happened, the two had to travel all over Russia with the coffin of the dead Emperor from one memorial service to another. "I had a long talk with Uncle Vladimir," wrote the Tsar in his diary, "about whether my wedding should be celebrated publicly or privately after the obsequies. Then came a royal messenger, and I dealt with official documents till evening. After the funeral service I went for a walk with Alix, but at half-past six the sad ceremony began, and the body of my dear father was carried to the church: the coffin was borne on a bier by Cossacks. This is the third time I have had to be present at a funeral service in this church. When we came back to the empty house, we absolutely broke down. God has afflicted us all with heavy trials."

After that the long journey began, and from every halting-place the young ruler has melancholy ceremonies to report: "We stopped at Borki and Kharkov, where a funeral service was held. . . ." "At Moscow we carried the coffin from the train to the hearse. On the way to the Kremlin we stopped ten times, a litany being sung before every church. The coffin was placed in the Archangel Cathedral; after the memorial service I prayed before the bones of the saints in the Uspenski Cathedral and in the Chudov Monastery. . . ." "At Obukhovo station we again

entered the train reserved for the mourners and arrived in St. Petersburg at ten. The reunion with the rest of the relations was a painful one; the weather was grey and it was thawing. . . ."

"To-day I had again to live through the sorrow and affliction which the 20th of October brought us. The service celebrated by the Archbishop began at half-past eleven, and after that my dear, never-to-be-forgotten father was blessed and committed to earth."

"Such was my entry into Russia," said Alix later. "Our marriage seemed to me a mere continuation of the masses for the dead, with this difference, that I now wore a white dress instead of a black!" The young Tsaritsa, from the outset of her stay in Russia, was a disliked and even detested stranger. Beginning with the Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna, a strong feeling against "the German" spread through all Court circles, and this universal frigidity persisted even after Alix of Hesse became Empress of Russia. She did her best to win the sympathy of her mother-in-law and the Court; but all her attempts in this direction were wrecked on this prejudice as well as by her own shyness and awkwardness. She says herself, "The young Emperor was too much occupied with events to be able to devote himself to me, and from shyness, loneliness, and the multitude of impressions crowding on me I did not know which way to turn."

In addition to the Court of the young Emperor and Empress, a second Court soon formed itself round the Dowager Empress, the centre of waves of ill-will against Alexandra Fedorovna. The older Court ladies, with Princess Obolenski and Countess Vorontsov at their head, had always something to lay to the account of the young Empress, were always spreading fresh gossip against her, and did their best to embitter the life of that lonely and helpless young woman. Her letters of this period contain frequent complaints about her loneliness: "I feel quite alone and in despair." Once when she was driving with one of her ladies, a beggar came up to the carriage and held out his hand for alms; she gave him something and he smiled gratefully. "That is the first smile I've received in Russia," she remarked sadly to her companion.

From the coldness of Court circles the young wife fled to the only place where she felt secure and happy, to her husband and

the intimacy of her home. But even here pure, untroubled happiness was denied her, for here the deepest grief of her life had its source: the Tsar passionately longed for a son, the Empire was expecting an heir to the throne, and the Empress bore one daughter after another. With increasing sorrow she had to bear the silent reproaches of her mother-in-law, the Court, and even the whole country, as if she had proved inadequate to her duties as Empress. It was only in the midst of the bloody disaster of the Russo-Japanese War that the longed-for event took place: on July 30th, 1904, Alexandra gave birth to a son. Transported with happiness, the Tsar wrote the same day in his journal:

July 1904 Alexei is born

"A great and unforgettable day, on which the grace of God has manifestly been vouchsafed to us. At a quarter past one Alix gave birth to a son, who at prayers received the name of Alexei. In the morning I received a report from Kokovtsov and a visit from the wounded officer of artillery, Klepikov, and then went to have lunch with Alix. Half an hour later the joyful event took place. I have no words in which to express my gratitude to God for this consolation in our heavy trials. Dear Alix is well. At five o'clock the children and I went to a thanksgiving service, at which the whole family had assembled. . . ."

From now onwards the life of the parents was entirely absorbed in their joy in—and alas! also in their anxiety for—their little son. The Tsesarevich developed into a charming, lovable boy with fair, curly hair, who was the delight of the Emperor and Empress and all about them. With ever-fresh happiness they watched his first movements, and his games, and listened to his first attempts at speech. But to their horror the parents discovered that their "only treasure," as the Emperor calls his son in his diary, the happy, laughing boy with the golden hair, had a painful and incurable disease. Any careless movement might be his death, for the eagerly expected and idolized Alexei suffered from hemophilia, that terrible disease in which the slightest injury may be fatal. Whenever he violently hit his foot or his arm an internal hemorrhage immediately occurred, accompanied by a bluish swelling and severe pains. Thus the life of the heir to the throne was, from the beginning, a series of torments for him and a source of continual fear for those about him.

The parents of the unhappy child tried, by giving him presents, to console him for his many privations, and to make him forget that the games which other children of his age enjoy were forbidden to him. His room was full of the most costly and expensive playthings, great railways, with dolls in the carriages as passengers, with barriers, stations, buildings, and signal-boxes, flashing engines and marvellous signalling apparatus, whole battalions of tin soldiers, models of towns with church towers and domes, floating models of ships, perfectly equipped factories with doll-workers, and mines in exact imitation of the real thing, with miners ascending and descending. All the toys were mechanically worked, and the little Prince had only to press a button to set the workers in motion, to drive the warships up and down the tank, to set the church bells ringing and the soldiers marching.

But what was the use of all these fine and perfect playthings? Alexei sat among them, watched by the faithful sailor Derevenko, who was ever on the alert to prevent the boy from making any dangerous movement with arm or leg. He never dared to run, jump, or romp like other children; at once came the voice: "Alexei, take care, *you* will hurt *yourself*."

It was wretched for the child to have to sit quiet all the time when he would have gladly given all his costly playthings for one day of free and unrestricted frolic. If he could just once, only once, be allowed to rush about to his heart's content without hearing Derevenko's warning voice: "Alexei, take care, be careful!"

Again and again the Tsesarevich would come to his mother with requests that she was obliged sorrowfully to refuse. "Give me a bicycle, Mama," he would plead, and the Tsaritsa had to answer, "Alexei, *you* know that cycling is too dangerous for *you*."

"I would like to learn to play tennis like my sisters."

"*You* know *you* are not allowed to play."

And the child would burst into tears and cry in despair: "Why am I not like other boys?"

Often it was impossible to check his natural impulses; the boy took a quick step or two, made a thoughtless movement, and the

mischief was done. He began to bleed, and nothing would stop the bleeding. The best doctors of the capital attended the sick child and tried every means known to medical science. The Tsesarevich lay moaning pitifully, and his helpless parents had to look at the apparently inevitable approach of death. Despairing intercessory services were held in the chapel of Tsarskoe Selo and were continued until the miracle happened once again and the dying boy was saved.

But terrible as her son's malady in itself was for the Tsaritsa, she had besides a special reason for despair: she was perpetually tormented by the thought that she herself was to blame for the agonizing suffering of her child. For hemophilia was hereditary in her family, and one of her uncles, a younger brother, and two nephews had died of it. This mysterious disease, as a rule, attacks only males, so that the Empress herself had escaped, while transmitting it to her son.

As soon as the parents were certain of the disease of the heir to the throne they abandoned formal Court life altogether and withdrew into their intimate family circle. Henceforward, all their care was devoted to the sick boy. Whenever Alexei played, his parents saw everywhere a possibility of danger—death lurking behind every one of his playthings, ready suddenly and unexpectedly to pounce and snatch away their beloved son.

As a result of all this agitation the Empress fell ill of a serious nervous ailment, which manifested itself at first in stubborn, nervous abdominal pains and confined her to bed for a long time.

* * * * *

But while trouble was beginning to find a footing in the imperial family and to cast its shadow over the idyll of Tsarskoe Selo, there was looming up in the background the still more terrible spectre of the great catastrophe that was preparing in these "twenty-three happy years."

It began with the coronation festivities in Moscow: in the midst of the magnificent entertainments there occurred one of the most ghastly disasters in history. The young Emperor, in accordance with ancient custom, had made great preparations for a general "entertainment of the people" on the Khodinski

Field on the outskirts of Moscow. The people assembled in thousands from far and near to be for once the "guests of the Tsar." In joy and jubilation they crowded in increasing masses round the tables spread with good things, when suddenly the gay scene was transformed into a picture of horror. In order to level the field, some careless officials had had a big trench covered over with boards; under the weight of the crowd the boards gave way and thousands fell into the trench, while those behind pushed heedlessly on. Soon the whole of the huge trench was filled with human beings, trampling each other down in their desperate fight for life, a mass of people, mad with panic, rolling over each other. This festival to celebrate the Tsar's coronation exacted about three thousand victims, and the police were occupied for hours in disposing of the bodies with all possible speed.

In the popular memory the accession to the throne of Nikolai II was always associated with this catastrophe and, although the Tsar was not directly to blame for it, it sowed the first seeds of hatred against him. For the advisers of the young ruler concealed from him the full significance of what had happened and recommended that the remainder of the festivities should be proceeded with. In spite of the irresponsibility of this advice the young Emperor had not the courage to resist it, and so it came about that he danced with his wife at a Court ball, while outside the bodies of the victims were still unburied. This apparent indifference to an event that plunged the whole of Moscow into deepest mourning naturally produced an effect of heartlessness, even of provocative arrogance, and Nikolai was never afterwards "really loved" in Moscow.

Only a few weeks later another disaster happened at other festivities in honour of the new Tsar. At Kiev a decorated ship with three hundred persons on board sank before his eyes and only a few were saved. These ominous happenings at the time of his accession and coronation were the beginning of an almost unbroken series of bloody disasters; fresh misfortune dogged his steps in a hundred different forms and variations. As if subject to an inevitable curse, all Nikolai's enactments, however well meant they might be, turned out badly. The reason was, per-

haps, that in his perpetual fear of fresh misfortunes, he had not the courage to act directly and energetically, but always, in Witte's phrase, "sought for by-paths, and on those by-paths arrived always at the same goal, a dirty puddle or a pool of blood." Unprejudiced witnesses, statesmen whose attitude towards him was in many respects critical, assure us that Nikolai was often animated by the best intentions and honestly tried to serve his country according to his lights. But the true picture of Russia under this rule is painted in striking words by Tolstoi in a letter to the Emperor, written in 1902, when he felt that death was near:

"I do not wish to die," he writes, "without having told you what I think of your activities up to the present, what, in my view, they have been, how much good your rule might bring to yourself and millions of human beings, and how much evil they will bring if you continue in the direction in which you are now going. One-third of Russia is in the state of so-called 'heightened defence,' that is to say, in a state of complete anarchy. The army of police, secret and public, is steadily growing; the prisons, places of exile, and penitentiaries in Siberia are filled to overflowing, not only with hundreds of thousands of common criminals, but also with political prisoners, with whom workers are now included. The censorship forbids everything with an arbitrariness greater than that which prevailed in the worst period of the 'forties. Religious persecutions have never been so frequent and cruel as they are to-day, and this state of affairs is daily growing worse. In the towns and the great industrial centres troops are massed, who are called out against the people, and armed with loaded muskets. In many places there has already been fratricidal bloodshed, and further bloodshed is preparing and will inevitably occur. As a result of all this inhuman administration the peasantry, those hundred million men on whom the power of Russia depends, become poorer every year, and famine is a regular and even normal phenomenon in our country. . . ."

This Tsar, who had desired to live in history as the apostle of world-peace, by his unstable and vacillating policy caused the two greatest wars of the twentieth century, or at least did very

little to prevent them. In the war against Japan he was egged on by frivolous councillors, by ministers who wanted "a little victorious war" to distract attention from the intolerable domestic situation. The Emperor had to suffer a campaign which they thought could be treated as a "bagatelle," in which one defeat led to another, and in which the best regiments of Russia poured out their blood in Manchuria, and the proud battle fleet was annihilated in the Bay of Tsushima.

Before this disastrous war ended new troubles broke over Russia: civil war threatened, unrest and revolts occurred all over the country, and the throne seemed all at once seriously endangered. The impetus to these new horrors was given by a massacre that took place directly under the windows of the Emperor. Some hungry and discontented workers, led by the Priest Gapon, had marched to the Winter Palace to present a humble petition to the Tsar. The demonstrators carried ikons and pictures of the Emperor, and were animated by the most peaceful intentions. Nevertheless, the military commandant, without warning, received the procession with volleys of musketry, as a result of which hundreds wallowed in blood.

From this day forward a bitter anger against the Emperor prevailed, and earned him the evil name of "the Bloody." Rebellions increased; all over the vast Russian Empire there were risings among the masses, and soon the Imperial Palace was like a beleaguered fortress. Revolts and massacres followed each other in unbroken succession, in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in Warsaw, Kiev, and Odessa, in the Baltic Provinces, and in Kronstadt. Blood had flowed in streams before the Emperor's ministers succeeded in crushing the Revolution.

And more blood flowed after this was finally accomplished: the special tribunals inflicted death sentences in scores and hundreds, and punitive expeditions were fitted out that exterminated the population of whole villages in the rebellious provinces and razed their houses to the ground.

Henceforth, the imperial family, too, lived in perpetual fear of murderous attacks, bombs, and infernal machines. As the Empress, after one of those "care-free" sea-trips, took leave of her fellow voyagers, she was in the habit of saying: "It was lovely—

perhaps it is the last time." Not for a single moment could the royal couple be sure of their lives; any hour might mean death.

One minister after another fell a victim to assassination. On the eve of the Revolution Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, and seven of his retinue were blown to pieces by a bomb in Warsaw Station. A little later the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the uncle of the Tsar and brother-in-law of the Tsaritsa, died by the hand of an assassin. He was Governor-General of Moscow, and as such, had made himself bitterly hated for his pitiless harshness and cruelty. His wife, the Grand Duchess Elisaveta Fedorovna, the Tsaritsa's sister, had foreseen the trouble, and had tried to prevent her husband from going out alone. But one day she heard the explosion of a bomb in the street, and, seized with terrible forebodings, had rushed out immediately, to see at her feet, covered with blood, the mutilated body of the murdered Grand Duke.

Elisaveta Fedorovna had loved her husband, in spite of his capricious and domineering character—he was often in a state bordering on mental derangement—and after his terrible end she retired for life to a convent near Moscow. With her beautiful, serious face she made people think of a Madonna in her nun's dress, and her slim, graceful figure under the flowing white veil was at once touching and fascinating. When she left the convent, on special occasions, and appeared at the Court at St. Petersburg she always aroused feelings of admiration and reverence, as if she, with her clear, innocent eyes, her regular features, and her delicate, almost floating walk, were the good angel of the imperial family.

Not long after the last a new catastrophe occurred in the immediate circle of the Tsar, which almost cost the life of one of his best counsellors, Stolypin, the Prime Minister. Stolypin was spending the summer on the so-called "Apothecaries' Island," not far from the capital, when his house was blown up by an infernal machine. Over forty people were killed or wounded by the explosion; the Prime Minister himself escaped by a miracle, but his daughter was crippled for life.

But fate had granted Stolypin only a brief respite: in 1911, at a gala performance in the theatre at Kiev, he was shot, under

the eyes of the Emperor, by a young anarchist who had insinuated himself into the confidence of the secret police on the pretext of having discovered a conspiracy, and had in this way obtained entry to the theatre. The mortally wounded minister, falling back in his seat, had only time, before he expired, to look up to the imperial box and make the sign of the cross.

It was against this dark background of disasters of all kinds, war, rebellion, executions, and murders, that the "idyll of Tsarskoe Selo" so strangely stood out. Here, bathed in light, a picture of middle-class contentment was displayed: the Tsar playing billiards, the Tsaritsa gaily talking with her friend Ania, the children happily engaged in needlework, or performing little comedies and arranging house balls. And there, in the background, as it were, a land in devastation, towns treated to volleys of musketry, long trains of exiled prisoners on their way to Siberia, prisons, and the bodies of muzhiks and ministers riddled with bullets.

While in the room next to the Empress's a low entreating whistle was sounding, like the longing cry of a bird, in far Manchuria the groans of dying soldiers were mingling with the thunder of cannons. The Emperor Nikolai was calmly and safely playing tennis, and hardly ever missing a ball, while at the same moment his fleet with many thousands of brave sailors sank in Chinese seas.

The Emperor's continuing to live his untroubled life, shooting, walking, playing tennis, swimming, and rowing, in the midst of all these calamities, was bound to give an impression of frivolous provocation. A large part of the population was even inclined to ascribe this curious indifference of the Emperor in the face of disaster to cruelty and entire lack of feeling. Many of the courtiers, ministers, and ambassadors could cite concrete cases in which the Tsar displayed this queer lack of understanding of the sorrows and sufferings of his subjects in a peculiarly blatant form.

This characteristic showed itself for the first time on the occasion of the disaster on the Khodinski Field, when the young Emperor did not countermand the festivities, but was himself present at a ball. On May 14th, 1905, when the Russian fleet

was annihilated at Tsushima, the Emperor received the news while he was playing tennis. He opened the dispatch, said: "What a terrible disaster," and, taking up his racquet, went on with the game. He showed the same calmness over the assassinations of Plehve and his uncle, and also, later, over the murder of Stolypin, of which he was actually an eye-witness.

His diaries, too, confirm the impression that the Emperor was completely lacking in any understanding of grave events. In his notes he merely touches on happenings of the greatest importance, disasters, and tragic fatalities; such things occupy no more space than remarks about quite trivial everyday matters. Among detailed accounts of the bags at shooting parties, of excursions and walks, the greatest events of his reign are referred to in passing. In particular, his notes on the course of the war with Japan are so scanty as to give the impression that he deliberately shirked dealing seriously with the subject. Here and there, it is true, the unfavourable news from the Far East depressed him; but he proceeds at once to happier subjects and tells of rides, of the weather, and of cosy evenings with his Alix. On the decisive day of Tsushima the Tsar writes: "Depressing and contradictory reports are arriving all the time about the unfortunate battle in the Bay of Tsushima. I heard three reports, then the two of us went for a walk. The weather was wonderful and warm. We had tea and dinner on the balcony. In the evening I gave audience to Bulygin and Trepov, who stayed a long time."

Even the Revolution left very few traces in the diaries; here and there he expresses his displeasure; he is particularly angry over the mutiny on the armoured cruiser "Potemkin"; he dismisses the massacre before the Winter Palace in a few indifferent words; but, otherwise, the reports of shooting parties and other expeditions continue to occupy most of the space.

Yet, in spite of everything, the reproach that Nikolai and Alexandra were cruelly unfeeling must, on closer consideration, be characterized as unjust. The apparently perfect, untroubled happiness of their family life, the "idyll of Tsarskoe Selo," that no external event could disturb, did not betoken a cynical provocation, an arrogant lack of understanding of the sufferings of their people, but rather a way of escape for two weak people,

dogged by misfortune and harassed by perpetual fear, who tried to hide from fate in their narrow, secluded "happiness."

While Nikolai and Alexandra moved within this "magic circle" they were handsome, happy, good, and lovable people. The few who were admitted to their secluded home life admired the beauty of the Empress and the happy, natural glance of the Emperor, and spoke with sincere enthusiasm of the charming character of the couple. But anyone who caught sight of them outside this peaceful domesticity, who met them at receptions, festivities, or on other State occasions, and who was not dazzled by outward appearances, felt immediately that here were two shy, fearful, everlastingly embarrassed people.

Everyone had to admit that the slim figure and beautiful face of the Empress gave an impression of majesty, and that the Emperor had charming social manners and was amiable, although self-conscious; but they felt at the same time that Alexandra's upright carriage was forced and artificial and that Nikolai's courteous smile was unnatural and constrained. Paléologue, the French Ambassador at the Court of St. Petersburg, had frequent opportunity of observing the imperial couple at State functions. He reports that, in conversation, the Empress used to look fixedly into vacancy, her smile quickly became set, and her characteristic shy blush alternated with livid pallor. Her bluish lips were swollen, and the diamond ornaments on her breast rose and fell with her laboured breathing. "Until the end of dinner, which was very long, the poor woman was obviously struggling with hysteria. Her features suddenly relaxed when the Emperor rose to propose the toast." With this observation, Paléologue concludes his account.

Strangers could not help being immediately struck by her shyness and awkwardness, from which she had suffered as a young girl, and which she never succeeded in overcoming, even in later years. Alexander Taneev, the faithful and devoted Keeper of the Privy Purse, was amazed when, during his first interview with the young Tsaritsa, she confusedly bent down to pick up some papers he had inadvertently let fall. Even in conversation the Empress was shy and lacking in confidence; she often stuck in the middle of a sentence, began to stammer, and was unable

to continue. This awkwardness earned her the contempt of the Court, and many people mockingly called her a "little German provincial," with a malicious allusion to the "petty Court" of Hesse, which was despised and looked down on in Russia.

Often, however, her embarrassment was thought to be due to pride and haughtiness. She was incapable of unconstrained friendliness, and the Court at once attributed this to coldness and arrogance. Some even denied her any beauty, and maintained that her figure was clumsy, her face uninteresting, and that their total impression of her left them quite indifferent. The frigid reception she met with everywhere must inevitably have increased her reserve and nervousness; she felt unhappy and lonely whenever she was obliged to leave her intimate home circle. Only with her family did she get rid of this oppressive nightmare; there she was gay, open-hearted, and friendly.

The character of the Tsar, too, although quite different from hers, yet showed similar traits: he, too, was fundamentally shy and constrained; he, too, hated all official functions and he, too, was credited with haughtiness and insincerity. Nikolai II, by the sudden death of his father, reached the throne while still young, and was consequently ill-prepared for his difficult position. Accordingly, in the first part of his reign, he relied entirely on the advice of experienced relations, and was largely influenced by his energetic and intelligent mother. Lacking all experience in State affairs, he was at first completely in the hands of his ministers, which was for the best in so far as these had been for many years the advisers and confidants of his father. But in the course of time, they all, one after the other, died either natural or violent deaths, and the young Tsar, for good or ill, had himself to choose his new ministers. But for this he lacked not only an inborn knowledge of men, but also all opportunity to become acquainted with useful men. His grandfather, Alexander II, was accustomed to frequent all circles, even private, by which means he made the acquaintance of a very large number of people, and he did not hesitate to appoint as a minister anyone whom he thought capable, without any regard to his previous rank. Nikolai II, on the other hand, held aloof from all

social life, so that he was restricted to a very narrow field in his choice of advisers.

Moreover, the Emperor was lacking in strength of will, energy of character, and consciousness of aim: it was easy for anyone to talk him over, but no one could ever be sure that he would adhere to the decision he had made. It often happened that he apparently accepted a proposal of a minister with complete conviction, and then, a little later, gave an exactly opposite order. This characteristic was only too well known to his ministers, and they often had recourse to curious expedients in order to guard themselves against surprises. On one occasion the old Prime Minister Goremykin, on his return from an audience in which he had persuaded the Tsar to approve an important measure, gave orders that under no circumstances was he to be awakened before midday. He had correctly foreseen that the Tsar would send a contrary order the same night, and took this means to secure that no one would dare to bring him the new order, and that the desired measure would be put into force in the interval.

The Emperor had an avowed dislike of painful scenes and discussions, and, therefore, preferred to deal with unpleasant business in writing. The fact that he had decided to dismiss a minister did not prevent him from receiving the latter in the most friendly fashion, and then, immediately after, surprising him with a written order of dismissal. Inevitably, he gained a reputation for insincerity.

Meanwhile, as time went on, the circle of those trusted by the imperial couple became narrower and narrower. Even once intimate friends of the family were, one after the other, politely but firmly set aside; under Alexander III, Prince Obolenski had been on intimate terms with the imperial family, and was always invited to luncheon after he had made his report in the morning. The new imperial couple found this regular guest a nuisance, and the Tsar tried all sorts of subterfuges to evade the invitation. Finally he found the way out by postponing the Prince's report until the afternoon.

In the period immediately following his accession Nikolai was still very much under the influence of his relations, especially

"Uncle Misha," "Uncle Alexei," and "Sandro," the Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich. Soon, however, the Emperor broke off relations with this group and, for a time, fell even more strongly under the influence of another family group, composed of the Grand Dukes Nikolai and Peter Nikolaevich, generally called, for short, "the Nikolaevichi," on account of their common patronymic, and their wives, the two "Montenegrins," Militsa and Anastasia.

These beautiful and interesting women, daughters of Prince, afterwards King, Nikita of Montenegro, had contrived with great skill to insinuate themselves into the confidence of the Tsaritsa. They saw her helpless position in an entourage alien and hostile to her, and they overwhelmed her with proofs of love, devotion, and esteem. When the Empress was suffering from an abdominal complaint they made of this an opportunity to win her favour. They superseded her regular attendants, and themselves undertook to nurse her, and fulfilled all the duties connected with this task with admirable zeal. The reason for their attitude was, of course, only too transparent: to that time the "Montenegrins" had played an insignificant part at the Imperial Court, and they now saw a chance of winning an influential position through the Tsaritsa. In spite of this Alexandra met their ostentatiously paraded love and devotion with sincere gratitude. It was the "Montenegrins," too, who succeeded in satisfying the mystical tendencies of the Empress, and who introduced her to a series of "miracle-workers," "magicians," and "holy men." At first this common interest in the supernatural world strengthened the friendly relations between the three women; a little later, however, this very mysticism led to a complete break between them.

The Empress's precarious health helped further to curtail both official Court life and also intercourse with the other members of the family. At this time, this seclusion had already gone to such lengths that it was extremely difficult even for the Grand Dukes and Duchesses to obtain audience of the Emperor and Empress.

From then on Nikolai and Alexandra lived a lonely life in

their home at Tsarskoe Selo. Gradually the Tsaritsa became her husband's only confidante, and both official receptions and private visits of other relations became fewer and rarer.

Only one solitary person succeeded in breaking through the iron barrier that surrounded the imperial pair. This was Anna Alexandrovna Taneeva, who quickly gained the confidence of her mistress and soon became her only intimate friend. A year or two after "Ania's" first appearance at Court she was already, in a sense, regarded as belonging to the intimate family circle; the Empress called her "our big baby" and "our little daughter," and gave her her unreserved confidence about all her cares, worries, and doubts. Anna was the daughter of Taneev, the director of the Imperial Chancellery, a most distinguished and conscientious man, who had also a considerable reputation as a composer. She had been summoned to Tsarskoe Selo at the age of twenty-three, to take the place of Princess Orbeliani (one of the maids of honour, who had fallen ill), and had formed a warm friendship with the Empress during a cruise in the Finnish islands. When they parted after this holiday Alexandra cried happily: "I thank God for having at last sent me a true friend."

And Ania was in truth a real friend to her Empress up to her tragic end: Alexandra's last letters and her last words of love were for Ania, and Ania, too, up to the end, did everything humanly possible to serve, help, and support her royal friend. This woman, who enjoyed the unlimited trust and affection of the Empress, was a most unusual and original person, whose character, outlook, and bearing exquisitely fitted her for the idyll of Tsarskoe Selo. Amid a crowd of Court flunkeys, all trying to win personal advantages by flattery and intrigues, Ania remained the sincere friend who never sought her own ends. During the whole of her intimate intercourse with the imperial family she had no other thought or wish than to be allowed to sacrifice herself for Nikolai, Alexandra, and their children. She had no rank or official position at Court, and the material support given her by the Empress was ludicrously small. She herself had no private means, and her circumstances may be described as indigent. Occasionally the Tsaritsa succeeded in making her accept some worthless trinket or a dress, and her

whole appearance was of a piece with this extreme modesty. "No royal favourite," remarks Paléologue, in amazement, "ever looked more unpretentious." She was rather stout, of coarse and ample build, with thick, shining hair, a fat neck, a pretty, innocent face with rosy, shining cheeks, large, strikingly clear, bright eyes, and full, fleshy lips. She was always very simply dressed, and with her worthless adornments had a provincial appearance. For some time after a railway accident of which she was one of the victims she was able to move about only on crutches, or was wheeled about in a bath-chair.

Anna Taneeva was for a short time unhappily married to a naval lieutenant called Vyrubov, but the marriage was dissolved in less than a year because Vyrubov was subject to severe nervous attacks, which at times degenerated into madness. This melancholy experience only strengthened her relations with the Tsaritsa, for, disappointed in her marriage, she attached herself all the more closely and devotedly to her imperial friend.

"The Vyrubova," as Ania was henceforward known to the whole of Russia, often passed for a dangerous intriguer, and foreign diplomatists, in particular, have more than once represented her in this light. There can be no doubt that Anna Vyrubova did engage in politics to a considerable extent, and influenced the fate of Russia in more than one respect. Her "intrigues," however, never served her own ends, but always those of the imperial couple.

After her separation from Lieutenant Vyrubov, Anna resumed possession of a modest cottage not far from the Palace of Tsarskoe Selo, which she had rented during her betrothal. Hardly a day passed on which she did not appear at the Palace, or receive a visit from the imperial family in her home. "Ania's little house" gradually became one of the imperial couple's favourite resorts, for there they were quite undisturbed and remote from burdensome official duties; there they could be entirely free and careless, and could cast aside all considerations of etiquette. Later on, the little house became a place of high political importance; for it was there that the Emperor and Empress met all the people whom they could not receive officially at the Palace. The cottage lay at the corner of Sredniaia Street and Tserkovnaia

Street, scarcely two hundred paces from the Palace, so that the Tsar and Tsaritsa could visit it on foot whenever they liked, without attracting attention.

Anna Vyrubova herself describes her home as primitive and rather uncomfortable. It had no foundations, and was therefore very cold; this was especially noticeable in winter, when an icy cold blast rose from the floor. "On my marriage the Empress gave me six chairs with covers embroidered by her own hands, as well as a tea-table and some water-colours. When their Majesties came to tea with me in the evenings, the Empress generally brought fruit and sweetmeats with her, and the Emperor sometimes brought a bottle of cherry brandy. We used to sit round the table with our legs drawn up so as to avoid contact with the cold floor. Their Majesties regarded my primitive way of life from the humorous side. Sitting before the blazing hearth we drank our tea and ate little toasted cracknels, handed round by my servant, Bertsik, a former valet of my late grandfather Tolstoi. I remember the Emperor once laughingly saying to me that, after such an evening, nothing but a hot bath would make him warm again."

The Vyrubova's modest way of living was the very thing that gave her special value in the eyes of the imperial couple. They felt that here, for the first time, they had met a really disinterested person, and they knew how to value this rare privilege. In time Ania became almost the only society of the imperial family, for even the number of the Court officials in attendance was always diminishing, since the suspicions of the Emperor perpetually demanded fresh victims.

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What a melancholy spectacle the Court of Nikolai and Alexandra afforded, compared with the brilliant times of earlier sovereigns! Once the Russian Imperial Court, both by its magnificence and by its lively social and political life, could put many of the great European capitals in the shade; former Russian rulers were always surrounded by the most important statesmen, the most skilled diplomatists, and the shrewdest wire-pullers of the time; around the Emperor subtle intrigues were planned, clever political duels fought out, and bold *coups d'état* carried

through. A gay profusion of busy figures had animated the capital: grand dukes and grand duchesses, the numerous princely uncles, aunts, and cousins of the sovereign, who exercised greater or less influence on the Emperor according to the nearness of the family relationship; the proud bearers of old noble names with their various ambitious interests; ministers, summoned to the Presence in their gold-laced Court dress, generals wearing their medals, dignitaries of the Church with gold crosses on their breasts, couriers and adjutants who brought important despatches and carried important despatches back again; a galaxy of Court ladies, princesses, and countesses, old and young, beautiful and ugly, in splendid toilettes adorned with glittering jewels.

At great receptions, State dinners, and rustling Court balls these formed the magnificent *décor,* and their figures had lent the Imperial Court of the past that colourful animation, those richly gleaming, characteristic hues which united the refinement, culture, and pulsing activity of European courts with the heavy, florid magnificence of Asiatic despotism.

Even under Alexander III, however, life had gradually become quieter; the colours faded, and the glitter grew dim. Alexander III passed most of the last years of his reign in the Palace of Gachina, outside St. Petersburg, or in the Crimea, and the Winter Palace became deserted. But, after the accession of Nikolai II, the last remnants of ceremonial Court life almost vanished. More and more seldom were important and striking figures to be seen at Court, and no one knew exactly whether they were all dead or whether they were just sitting at home because neither the new monarch nor his consort desired their society. A new generation of gifted young statesmen and diplomats was also lacking, since the ruler neither possessed the capacity for, nor felt the need of, attaching young and lively talents to his service.

The great contests of intriguing statesmen, which once the whole of Russia followed with breathless interest, became more and more rare, for the reign of Nikolai II offered no opportunity for an exciting war between really ambitious politicians. They retired and left the field to the insignificant stratagems of petty place-hunters.

The relatives of the imperial couple, too, the many grand-

ducal uncles, aunts, and cousins, one after another, began to keep away from the Court; every year fewer covers were laid for the official reunions at the ceremonial family dinner, until at last the Emperor and his wife and children sat round the table alone. The family now met only at masses for the dead, when one or other of the grand dukes died, or was the victim of a conspiracy.

The Empress hated, loathed, and feared her ladies-in-waiting, the princesses and countesses, the ladies, old and young, ugly and attractive, in their magnificent toilettes and their glittering jewels. In her eyes they were all "false, wicked cats," every one of whom was ready to betray her, to intrigue against her, and to spread gossip about her.

Nikolai and Alexandra were afraid of everybody and mistrusted everybody. The Emperor felt that all those courtiers who bowed before him in slavish devotion were ready at any moment to betray him without scruple for the sake of their own selfish interests. This perpetual suspicion of the monarch was bound in time to give the Court a peculiar stamp: anyone with opinions and a will of his own immediately seemed to the Emperor suspicious, or at least troublesome, and was banished; only quite colourless people seemed safe and were tolerated in the entourage of the imperial family, which, in an ever-increasing degree, came to consist of uninteresting and insignificant shadow figures. But the few men whom the Emperor tolerated about him and trusted, gained ever greater influence over him, while the rest of the Court officials were reduced to complete insignificance. Thus the number who could be initiated into the private affairs of the family was very small: they included in all two or three trustworthy aides-de-camp, the old Minister of the Court, and the Governor of the Palace, men of delicate tact who, from fear of giving offence, refrained from any expression of opinion whatever. They never said "no" to anything, and their lack of judgment was so great that they could sincerely approve whatever the Tsar and Tsaritsa did. These "intimates" came and went on tiptoe and anxiously avoided ever bringing an unpleasant report in their portfolios. Their spirits were always equably gay; their favourite topic was the weather; and they inquired daily

with devoted politeness after the same trifling matters as if everything in the world were arranged for the best.

This was not courtly hypocrisy, for they were men of much too simple and innocent minds ever to observe any injustice or evil anywhere. Of all the evil things that were enacted in Russia during their period of service they had really seen and heard nothing, so that they were spared the necessity of approaching the imperial couple with disturbing reports.

Right up to the day on which the revolutionary soldiers broke into the Palace and laid rough hands on the "imperial dreamers" in order to take them prisoners and, later, to execute them, the peace of the "idyll of Tsarskoe Selo" was protected by these faithful servants, whose feet trod softly and whose refined upbringing took care that Nikolai and Alexandra never became aware of the perilous illusoriness of their hot-house happiness.

Without this little circle of eternally optimistic courtiers the idyll of Tsarskoe Selo would never have been possible; but also, without these creatures, who never appeared with an unpleasant question or report, this idyll would hardly have led to such a fatal end for the Tsar and the Empire. These Fredericks, Voeikovs, Zablins, and Nilovs contributed not a little to the terrible collapse, the frightful end of the idyll of Tsarskoe Selo.

The most interesting of them was without doubt the Minister of the Court, Fredericks, a very distinguished old gentleman who had occupied his confidential post as long as anyone could remember. He was the best type of tactful person, a master of etiquette and Court formalities. His was the difficult office of arranging all the private affairs of the imperial family, fixing the appanages of the grand dukes and their wives, distributing presents, suppressing scandals, and paying debts. He had to look after the well-being of all the members of the imperial house, and thus had always to be initiated into the most intimate secrets of the family. The imperial couple were very fond of this handsome, elegant old man; they called him "our old man," and allowed him to address them as "mes enfants."

It is true that Count Fredericks had already become a little peculiar owing to his great age: his memory was no longer what it had been, and amusing stories were told about him in Court

circles. On one occasion when Prince Orlov, the chief of the Military Chancery, was submitting a report to him, Count Fredericks suddenly interrupted him with the question: "What do you think, my dear Prince? I believe I haven't been shaved to-day." Orlov declared that he could not say, and went on with his report. Five minutes later Fredericks laid his hand on his shoulder and said: "Excuse me a moment, I haven't been shaved to-day." The Prince smiled and said it would perhaps be best to ask the valet. The old Count rang the bell and, when the servant appeared, asked him whether he had been shaved. The valet said he had.

Hardly had Orlov ended his report when Fredericks rose from his chair, crying: "I haven't been shaved yet. I must go to the barber." But on the way he fell asleep in his carriage, and the coachman elected to bring him home again unshaven.

Stories of this kind were told everywhere with the greatest gusto, but this in no way interfered with the universal popularity of the Minister of the Court. Only Count Witte, always malicious, declared bluntly that Fredericks was "abundantly lacking in ideas," and that his colleagues had to hammer his reports for the Emperor into him like a school task.

Voeikov, the son-in-law of Count Fredericks, was the Governor of the Palace. At the beginning the Tsaritsa did not care much for him; but later she changed her views.

A somewhat strange figure in the Emperor's entourage was the aide-de-camp, Admiral Nilov, a gruff old bear, who loved his wine; it was his custom to speak his mind plainly to everyone, even the Emperor; but as a matter of fact, his "truths" were sufficiently removed from the real truth never to give serious offence.

A curious part was played by the many other aides-de-camp, who watched each other jealously, and none of whom, with few exceptions, had any influence whatever. If anyone made a request to one of these officers he would reply: "I only open doors," or "I only play chess."

The financial position of all the aides-de-camp was very poor: they received salaries that hardly paid their tips, with the result that they often fell into the hands of moneylenders, speculated

on the Exchange, and did their best to make use of their position at Court for their own financial advantage. But only one of them had any real influence, Zablin, who had contrived to acquire the Emperor's confidence to some extent.

Thus the imperial couple were entirely isolated by these colourless, devoted courtiers, as by an impenetrable wall, from the outer world, from the whole Russian Empire. "It is pitiable!" exclaimed Sazonov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, on one occasion. "Little by little, a vacuum has formed round the imperial couple; no one can now approach them. With the exception of the official relations between the Emperor and his ministers, no voice from the outside world ever penetrates to the Palace."

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While Court life proper was thus gradually dying out, an all the more lively activity was developing in the political salons of the capital; such salons, of which there had been a number in earlier days, ever since the time of Frau von Krüdener, began to spring up like mushrooms at St. Petersburg in the beginning of the twentieth century.

The busy activity of the Court having been driven away from the Palace of Tsarskoe Selo, which came to bear an ever greater resemblance to an enormous and magnificent sick-room, it was forced to lead an inglorious, miserable, ghost-like existence in the political salons. The intrigues, schemes, rivalries, and plans which, in the glitter of the Imperial Palace, had had a certain style and could sometimes dazzle by their very vastness, languished in these little salons. Here what in the vicinity of the Emperor had been "politics" on the grand scale, degenerated into petty repulsive busyness, into endless agitated chatter and unsavory speculation.

Since men of rank and importance seldom gained access to the sovereign, had practically no influence over him, and never were sure of his real intentions, the new political salons of St. Petersburg did not centre round them, but generally round people whose relations with the Court depended on their acquaintance with some subordinate Court official who, precisely because of his low position, could always have access to the Emperor. It

was lackeys, doorkeepers, and other "dignitaries" of the kind whose friendship was now sought in political circles.

The fortunate man who could boast of relations with subordinate palace officials of this sort immediately became highly regarded, and a salon formed around him; politicians who aspired to ministerial rank thought it desirable to visit him, and also priests who wanted to be bishops, and contractors, bankers, and spies, whose business it was to secure trustworthy reports of the Emperor's doings. They all hoped to succeed through the intervention of a lackey or some other apparently insignificant Court official.

The busiest of these curious political circles was that of Prince Andronnikov. There innumerable people met daily to advance their own schemes by means of the excellent connection with Tsarskoe Selo enjoyed by the Prince. The Prince was often in a position to communicate to his friends the most secret decisions of the Emperor some hours before they were publicly announced, and thus do them very valuable service. Andronnikov was also able to advance requests of all kinds, and put through appointments and honours. Therefore, many a high functionary, officer, or prince of the Church regularly spent his mornings in the Andronnikov salon, until he had actually secured the desired promotion or decoration.

Andronnikov owed this remarkable influence over the decisions of the Emperor to a long-standing friendship with the Emperor's groom-of-the-chamber; in later years, he also came in touch with the Governor of the Palace; but the latter was never able to do him such valuable service as the groom-of-the-chamber. Through him he always knew what documents were lying on the Emperor's desk, and how Nikolai intended to decide this or that affair. The speculators and spies who frequented the salon based their enterprises and secret reports on these communications; Andronnikov's information was always very reliable, and the influence which the Prince, through the groom-of-the-chamber, exercised on the Emperor hardly ever failed of its effect.

There were times when even high dignitaries of the State like the War Ministers, Sukhomlinov and Belaev, princes of the Church like Bishop Varnava, and men who themselves were

favourably regarded at Court, received their real information in the Andronnikov salon, for the reports of the groom-of-the-chamber were more trustworthy than anything that these important gentlemen learnt during their personal visits to Tsarskoe Selo. In addition to these distinguished visitors, many poor frightened Jews crowded the Prince's salon, hoping, through the agency of Andronnikov, to secure the repeal of an order of banishment, in which hope they were seldom disappointed.

But the chief customer for Andronnikov's reports was the Ministry of the Interior. It was this high department of State that financed the whole business of the salon. Prince Andronnikov came of an impoverished family and, though he possessed practically no property, was a notorious spendthrift. But the Ministry of the Interior thought it desirable to pay out a considerable sum to him every month in order to secure the information supplied by the groom-of-the-chamber. By subsidizing Andronnikov, the Ministry saved large sums which would have had to be spent in spying on the monarch. The Ministry was well aware that the Tsar never spoke openly and unreservedly to his ministers, and that, in consequence, they could never trust his utterances, but must always be prepared for painful surprises. Through the Andronnikov salon, however, the Minister received exact information of the mood and intentions of the Tsar, which report had secured his approval, and which aroused his displeasure. The groom-of-the-chamber delivered the information, and the intelligent and cunning Prince guessed all the rest worth knowing.

At the same time, through his alliance with Andronnikov, the Minister was also always *au fait* with what the very reverend lord bishops, the generals, and the politicians were after at the moment. The Prince betrayed to the Ministry the plans which these gentlemen entrusted to him for transmission to the groom-of-the-chamber, and thus its officials were in a position to form a clear and accurate picture of all the events of internal politics.

Prince Andronnikov had long been regarded as an interesting personality in political and social circles. His appearance was typical of the perpetually busy man, who is acquainted with everybody and always dashing about the town on important and

secret missions, suddenly appearing here, there, and everywhere, and disappearing again, and whose whole life has a fascinating flavour of adventure. He always carried a large, bulging, bright yellow attaché case about with him, over the contents of which he dropped mysterious hints.

This attaché case in time became so famous that the police began to take an interest in its contents. On one occasion the Minister, Plehve, decided on a bold stroke: to have Andronnikov attacked and the case stolen. The plan succeeded, and an Okhrana official bore the yellow attaché case in triumph to the Minister. When he opened it Plehve found that it contained nothing but old newspapers.

But Andronnikov was more than a harmless poseur. He was a passionate intriguer, and took a fierce delight in setting ministers and bishops by the ears, originating libellous rumours, and breaking old friendships. He did this not so much for material advantage as, in Witte's opinion, "from a passionate love for the art of intrigue." With his malicious wit and his keen eye for the weaknesses of others, he was a very great danger to his opponents or the opponents of his friends. He could not only produce elegant and flattering little books in honour of ministers whom he favoured; he could publish equally elegant satirical pamphlets against his enemies, and contrived to slip these annihilatingly malicious "portraits" onto the desks of all the influential men in St. Petersburg.

In later years he acquired a paper of his own for the exercise of his literary activities. After that, whenever any of his enemies attempted to move, this journal immediately printed a leading article with remarks about the past life and the "true face" of the person in question, and these lines generally sufficed to make the unfortunate man a laughing-stock for the rest of his life.

In order to vent his spleen on various enemies of his, Andronnikov once published, in French, a book called *Contemporary Memoirs,* in which he discussed, with devastating irony, the activities and capacities of the different ministers, and which kept the whole of St. Petersburg society for weeks in a state of the greatest excitement. Even the members of the imperial house, the Dowager Empress and the grand dukes, were enormously

diverted by these memoirs, and the groom-of-the-chamber took care that a copy reached the Emperor's desk.

But while the Prince's literary gifts made him a dangerous opponent, it was his friendship with the groom-of-the-chamber that made his influential patronage so coveted. His prestige rose higher and higher, and his social and political connections visibly increased in scope and importance. As he was a welcome guest of the grand dukes, Mr. Shervashidze, the Steward of the Household of the Dowager Empress, sought his favour, which led the aristocracy to take an interest in him. Every new minister, on taking office, was confidentially informed by the head of his department that his predecessor had cultivated good relations with Andronnikov, so he also took over the traditional friendship, and left it as a legacy to his successor. The remainder of the high officials of the department knew that the minister was in touch with Andronnikov, and they also courted his favours; the lesser officials had always been accustomed to imitate their superiors, so they displayed an exaggerated devotion to the Prince. Whenever he appeared in a ministry the "chinovniki" officiously leapt from their chairs, helped him out of his fur coat, and pulled off his snow-boots.

Only two men were bold enough to refuse to pay due respect to the Prince: Sukhomlinov, the Minister for War, who had once transacted certain land speculations in Bukhara and Khiva with Andronnikov and afterwards quarrelled with him, and Maklakov, the Minister of the Interior. The latter had actually once dared to reply to a telegram of greeting from Andronnikov without becoming politeness, and had even withdrawn the Prince's free railway-pass. Both ministers later felt the weight of Andronnikov's power, for the ruthless Prince contrived rapidly to ruin them one after the other, and even to have the unfortunate Sukhomlinov confined in the Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul.

After this no one had the courage to oppose Prince Andronnikov, and Beletski, the Chief of Police, could justly maintain that, in the decade preceding the Revolution, no important decision was taken in Russian policy without Andronnikov's somehow having a finger in the pie.

But the Andronnikov salon was not the only one; it had an important rival in the circle surrounding Burdukov, the Imperial Master of the Horse. This Burdukov was also attached to the Ministry of the Interior, and his title of Master of the Horse had nothing whatever to do with his real functions. His political strength lay in his friendship with the Tsar's two favourite aides-de-camp, General Zablin and Admiral Nilov. Through the instrumentality of these two men he, too, was able to supply his clients and the visitors to his salon with rapid and trustworthy reports from Tsarskoe Selo. He was in regular postal and telegraphic communication with his friends at Court, and the "old sea-bear," Admiral Nilov, not infrequently appeared at his banquets and drinking parties to partake of a bottle or two of good wine. Burdukov's followers, that circle of political and social fortune hunters, maintained that their patron's influence at Court was greater and more valuable than that of Andronnikov. Between the two salons and their chiefs a bitter war raged, which was carried on with all the weapons of intrigue, slander, and espionage.

But whichever of these rival salons was the more influential, no one ever doubted that the hospitality of the Burdukov salon was superior to that of the Andronnikov. The reason for this was that the cost of the Andronnikov salon was met by the Ministry of the Interior from its restricted resources which, although abundant, were not inexhaustible, while behind the Burdukov salon stood the truly lavish and far-seeing financier, Ignati Porfirievich Manus.

Manus was anything but mean, in which he was most desirably different from the narrow-minded bureaucrats of the Ministry of the Interior. Manus knew very well that the sums he invested in the Burdukov salon were advantageously laid out, and would repay him tenfold, nay, a hundredfold. By the help of Burdukov he was enabled to overtop his most dangerous and powerful competitor, Dimitri Rubinstein, the banker, a victory which meant the crown of a brilliant financial career.

Manus, a Jew who had risen from poor circumstances, had always contrived to use the political situation cleverly for his business purposes. After he had succeeded in some considerable

speculations, he brought off his first really big transaction by allying himself with Prince Meshcherski, the fanatical champion of orthodox Pan-Slavism, and placing his fortune at the disposal of the Prince. With the help of Manus's Jewish money, Meshcherski, the reactionary and one-time friend of Dostoevski, was able to develop a lively anti-Semitic agitation in his *Grazhdanin*; Manus himself, under the pseudonym of Seleni, also wrote some ultra-nationalist articles for this paper. In this way Manus established excellent relations with the influential circles of the reaction and the nobility, and was soon regarded as the richest and most respected financier in St. Petersburg.

Like all really skilful financiers Manus, or the "yellow man," as he was called in St. Petersburg, liked to remain in the background; he was never concerned with the satisfaction of petty vanities, but always with great affairs, and he found it most satisfactory to shelter behind his protégé, Burdukov.

The chops and changes in the banker's operations often involved his executive in certain difficulties; thus Zablin once wrote despairingly to his principal: "You recently ordered me to stop abusing Bark, the Minister of Finance, and three days ago you even gave me strict orders to praise him. Now today, all of a sudden, I am to attack him again. I must ask you seriously to consider that it is somewhat difficult for me, after lauding a minister to the skies one day, to speak disparagingly of him the next."

Manus's commissions were rarely of a purely political character; they related generally to matters of business. What the financier wanted to obtain, by means of the Burdukov salon, was the grant of new concessions, building permits for factories, and food and army contracts.

During the Great War it was repeatedly asserted that Manus was in the employment of the German Secret Service, a suspicion entertained by the Minister Khvostov in particular. Although there was a fair amount of incriminating evidence against the banker, he went on with his work quite undisturbed, and hardly troubled about the accusations brought against him. The Burdukov salon, with its connections with Zablin and Nilov, afforded him such strong protection that right up to the outbreak of the

Revolution Manus never had to feel any serious alarm. Through this political circle which he financed and which served him, the "yellow man" was beyond the reach of his enemies and quite unassailable.

Of all these circles of adventurers, half-social, half-political, that were formed in St. Petersburg in the absence of a healthy Court life, the salon of the Baroness Rosen was particularly remarkable. While Prince Andronnikov proudly proclaimed to the world his relations with the Tsar's groom-of-the-chamber, and Burdukov made no secret of his friendship with Zablin and Nilov, the name of the personage who formed her connection with Tsarskoe Selo was never mentioned in the salon of the Baroness Rosen. No one knew whence the Baroness obtained her reliable reports; but there was no doubt that the channel existed, and that the information was nearly always correct. The discreet guests of the discreet hostess had long ago discovered that this was a carefully guarded secret, and they were satisfied if the "reliable source" delivered the reports and passed on their requests to Tsarskoe Selo. The Baroness Rosen, too, was in poor circumstances, but this did not prevent her from dressing with exquisite elegance and from giving most tasteful and sumptuous parties; her dinners sometimes surpassed in luxury even those of the "yellow man" in the Burdukov salon. There was some vague relationship between the Baroness and the beautiful Princess Dolgorukaia, a lady of Spanish origin, whose formal marriage with a Russian aristocrat had made it possible for her to carry through profitable transactions.

The curious Khvostov had tried more than once to fathom the secret of the Baroness Rosen and her life, and frequently visited her for this purpose. He met there, at intimate breakfasts, police spies and adventurers, including Rashevski, the notorious official of the Okhrana. At midday he found grand dukes and duchesses and some of his ministerial colleagues; while in the evening, in the same salon, he saw himself surrounded by actors, courtesans, and newspaper correspondents. A mysterious "engineer," who never appeared in person, paid alike for the breakfasts of the spies, the lunches of the grand dukes, and the dinners of the actors, courtesans, and journalists. But who this unknown "en-

gineer" was, his real reason for paying for all this, and where he got the necessary money, neither Khvostov's own perspicacity nor the machinery at his disposal ever succeeded in discovering.

There was still another circle that pursued different, more general, and more dangerous aims. This was the Ignatiev salon, where all the adherents of poisonous national and religious intolerance and political reaction assembled, with the object of directing the decisions of the Emperor.

Count Alexander Pavlovich Ignatiev, a former ambassador to the Sublime Porte and afterwards a minister, had been the first to foresee, as early as the reign of Alexander III, the decay of Court life and the rise of the salon. As soon as the old Emperor retired to Gagchina, Count Ignatiev, with the aid of his energetic wife, began to hold "political receptions" thrice a week. These soon developed into the notorious "black Ignatiev salon" that for a time was regarded as the influential political centre of the capital. Ignatiev, during whose ministry the most loathsome reactionary persecutions took place, used his salon as an active social instrument for his propaganda, as the starting-point of a thousand intrigues, all aimed at influencing the Court of the Tsar, in its isolation from the rest of the world, in the desired direction. Here assembled fanatical clergy and politicians from the ranks of the reactionary "All Russian Union," diplomatists, soldiers, and would-be ministers, who all, like their host, clung to the idea of the conquest of Constantinople, and had already worked out detailed military plans for that purpose. The circle also included bankers and contractors, who hoped, by pushing themselves forward at the right moment, to create valuable connections, and to secure orders and contracts for the coming war. Finally, the Count's salon was also frequented by various officials of the ministries and the police, gloomy men, imbued with "holy nationalistic convictions," supporters of absolute autocracy and the banishment to Siberia of all political opponents.

The same subordinate Court officials who were called upon to carry out business for the Andronnikov, Burdukov, and Rosen salons, were also used by the Ignatiev salon for purely political activities: theirs was the historic rôle of bringing the intolerance

and reaction of the "black salon" to the otherwise unapproachable ears of the Emperor.

In the early days, when the "black Count" was still vigorous and full of enterprise, the activities of his salon were of a serious nature, and exercised a fatal influence in many directions. But later, as the Count retired more and more from public life, and when he finally died, the political agitation of the Ignatiev salon increasingly degenerated into frivolous, tri-weekly gossiping. Not that the "black salon" under the direction of the old widowed Countess abated a jot of its reactionary ideas, its orthodox views, and its fierce intolerance; these had, however, since the Count's death, lost all serious significance. The same guests assembled as before, and carried on the same conversations; but the salon became more and more like a tea-party, at which bigoted old ladies gossiped with their spiritual pastors and with retired generals.

The older the hostess and her friends grew, the more apparent the endless garrulity of the circle became. Gradually, the political subjects of conversation, eternally the same, no longer sufficed, and they lapsed into that delight in mysticism and occultism which so often goes hand in hand with a reactionary temper. Thereafter, when the old ladies, generals, and clerics met thrice a week in the Countess's salon, they spent only a minute or two in assuring each other of their unchanged political and religious reactionariness, and by a tacit agreement, passed on to the subject of the "supernatural powers." With agreeable shivers running down their spines, they told each other till far into the night of "mystical experiences" and "revelations"; the guests of the "black salon" often found it difficult to tear themselves away, and went on endlessly talking in the doorway of the "secrets of the supernatural."

Soon everyone interested in the occult tried to gain admittance to Countess Ignatiev's circle. For in the meantime, the usual result of such associations of zealous drawing-room occultists had come about: when people assemble for the purpose of conjuring up the unseen in eternal chatter, the unseen does not long delay its appearance, and every day gives clearer signs. Thus,

in the Countess's salon, the magic world of spirits manifested itself in all sorts of "signs" and "astral phenomena."

Ere long the credulous, but still ignorant, members of the circle found their "teachers"; "messengers" were sent to the house, "clairvoyants," "mystagogues," and "barefoot pilgrims," who possessed the power of interpreting and explaining the supernatural signs. These "enlightened men" were all alike regarded by the guests with the greatest veneration as saints, and from the salon of the old Countess most of them found their way into the drawing-rooms of the "Montenegrins." In this way one or another finally arrived at Tsarskoe Selo, and appeared there with a firmly established reputation as a miracle-worker and "emissary from God."

And, in proportion as the Tsar and Tsaritsa, on account of the illness of the little heir-apparent, fell more and more under the spell of such "saints" and "clairvoyants," in the same degree they came more and more deeply under the influence of the ideas, wishes, and interests cultivated in the "black salon" of the Countess Ignatiev. Thus the morbid distaste of the Emperor for the advice and society of important men, his suspicion of all sincere people, and his complete isolation from his whole Empire finally led to a state of affairs in which only the petty interests of a reactionary circle of old women and retired generals could influence his decisions.

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From his earliest youth Nikolai II had accepted all the blows of fate with fatalistic resignation, in which a kind of humble religiosity gave him inner support. Later in life, too, both in his capacity as the ruler of an Empire tottering on its foundations, and as the father of a son plainly condemned to an agonizing death, he endeavoured to find refuge in the divine will. Evil, silent and mysterious, lay in wait for him everywhere, for which it was difficult to find any other explanation than that it was nothing else than a "divine ordinance." All attempts to resist it with the feeble strength of man were inevitably foredoomed to failure. "The Emperor believes in the decrees of fate," once declared one of his ministers. "If anything goes wrong,

instead of kicking against it, he immediately thinks that God has willed it so, and abandons himself without resistance to the will of the Almighty."

Thus for the Tsar there was no other way of salvation to be found except in a firm faith in Providence, a humble acceptance of all adversity and perpetual prayer for the help of the Lord. When, through some heavy blow or some too impetuous movement, the bleeding started in Alexei's little body, and his face, pale as death and distorted with pain, was turned to the wall, the Emperor and Empress sought strength in prayer. They prayed, too, before every important political decision, and, whenever difficulties and dangers to the State arose, they were convinced that these could be overcome only by prayer. When, in the year 1905, the Emperor, after much hesitation, signed the ukase summoning the Imperial Duma, the Tsar and Tsaritsa knelt down, and prayed to God that this grave decision might be a blessing to the Empire.

The Palace of Tsarskoe Selo contained a chapel, a half-darkened room with heavy silken hangings, against one wall of which rose the gleaming ikonostas. It had beautiful carved wooden arm-chairs for the imperial couple, and a number of plainer ones for the imperial children and the Court ladies. But this magnificently appointed chapel did not quite satisfy the wishes of the Empress, who was inclined to solitude, and she had another place prepared for her own devotions. In the crypt of the "Fedorovski Sobor," * the church of the Life Guards, not far from the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo, the Empress had a subterranean chapel fitted up, and betook herself there when she wanted to pray undisturbed. She would lie for hours on the stone flags in the dim light of a few oil lamps.

But, as one disaster followed another, and one new menace after another raised its head, the Tsar and Tsaritsa gradually began to feel the inadequacy of the strict Orthodox faith. In their trouble and fear they could no longer find any real satisfaction in the sermons and masses of the Court priests, the choral singing, and the ever-repeated prayers to which Heaven returned no answer. Like many weak and despairing souls before them,

* Fedorovski Cathedral.

they felt the need of coming into immediate touch with God, of seeing him directly face to face. The Orthodox Church, with its strict doctrines, was less suited than mysticism, whatever its kind, to satisfy this longing for a miracle.

The Empress, who had been brought up in the strict Protestant faith, and who, as a girl, had come for a time under the influence of the ideas of David Friedrich Strauss, became at once a zealous and fanatical adherent of Orthodoxy, after she became Empress of Russia and went over to the creed of Byzantium. Later she developed an increasing leaning towards mysticism, to which she afterwards succumbed completely. At this period she seems to have been very deeply influenced by a work of the fourteenth century dealing with mediation between God and man, and with the "friends of God," mortals especially endowed with grace. She firmly believed that men existed who could approach the Godhead through their fervent prayers, and who, therefore, though not themselves priests, could discharge the office of mediator between Heaven and earth better than any ordinary clergyman.

The Emperor was far from opposing these enthusiasms of his wife; he, too, as a young man, had inclined to religious mysticism, a characteristic he shared with his ancestor, Alexander I. This inclination had been encouraged in his father's house, for Alexander III had also been convinced of the miraculous power of man endowed with divine grace. At his father's Court the young heir-apparent had become acquainted with that strange figure, John of Kronstadt, who was regarded as a saint, not only by the simple people, but also by the old Emperor himself.

It is true that John of Kronstadt was a priest of the Orthodox Church; but, in the eyes of all Russia, he stood high above the rest of the clergy, for he was credited with the ability to perform miracles, foresee the future, and save the sick and suffering from their troubles. When he preached the people flocked in crowds to the church, and knelt before him in devotion. In grave situations, when important decisions had to be taken or a member of the family was ill, the Emperor Alexander used to summon the holy man to the Palace, and ask for his advice and help. His successor, Nikolai II, remembered all his life an early mass in the church

at Orianda, at which John of Kronstadt preached to the old Emperor, then seriously ill, and the whole imperial family, and prayed with them. In short, abrupt sentences, that sounded almost like cries, John of Kronstadt implored that the mercy and blessing of Heaven might descend on the imperial house. Nikolai was convinced that here spoke a truly holy man, a messenger of God. After that mass the Emperor shared with his whole heart the conviction of the thousands of pilgrims who, year in and year out, in their pious belief in miracles, came in crowds to John of Kronstadt.

And, on that dark day when Alexander III was hourly awaiting death, Nikolai witnessed another scene that was never to vanish from his memory. On entering his father's sick-room he saw him lying on the bed, struggling for breath, while John of Kronstadt bent over him, holding the Emperor's head in his hands, and whispering the last words of earthly consolation in the ears of the dying monarch.

Moreover, the man who was entrusted with the education of the heir-apparent, the first and chief adviser of Alexander III, the Procurator of the Holy Synod and influential statesman, Pobedonostsev, friend and patron of Dostoevski, also believed in supernatural powers and phenomena that could influence existence on earth. He was not only convinced of the holiness of John of Kronstadt; his belief in miracles went so far that he once carried out in his house, with the assistance of high prelates, a formal exorcism of devils. Like Pobedonostsev, most of the other ministers of the Emperor Alexander believed in supernatural powers, miracles, and prophecies, so that the young heir-apparent was reinforced on all hands in his mystical emotions.

This already morbid mysticism of the new imperial couple was afterwards further increased by their intercourse with the Grand Dukes Nikolai and Peter Nikolaevich and their wives. Although these grand-ducal couples were mainly interested in utterly absurd and primitive "occult séances," with table-rapping, spirit conjuring, and other spiritualistic nonsense, nevertheless, at that time, the Emperor and Empress, in their desire to escape somehow from the torment and care of their life in the world, snatched at anything that seemed to be a bridge to

the supernatural world. In their flight from the dark dangers of real life they abandoned themselves without reflection to the shallowest forms of occultism.

In the drawing-rooms of the "Nikolaevichi" and their wives all kinds of spiritualistic séances went on, and all sorts of prophets, clairvoyants, preachers, pilgrims, faith-healers, and miracle-workers tumbled over each other. The young Emperor and his wife came more and more under the influence of this circle, and, when later they both began to keep aloof from the Court and the rest of their relations, it was the "Nikolaevichi" who retained their confidence longest.

The Tsaritsa, it is true, later rejected spiritualism as practised in the houses of her relatives, and abhorred it as heathenish, since preoccupation with such things endangers true faith; nevertheless, her conviction of the existence of clairvoyants and mediators between Heaven and earth, men endowed with divine grace, remained unshaken to the end. This belief appeared to her to be not incompatible with the Orthodox doctrines. She continued to spend many hours in the subterranean chapel of Fedorovski Sobor, took communion, and followed all the ordinances of the Church; but she was always seeking for "miracle-workers" who would satisfy her primitive yearning for direct communication with the Godhead.

It was at the beginning of the century that the Empress met the first of the long series of the "miracle-workers of Tsarskoe Selo," the French "thaumaturge," Doctor Philippe, who started those curious séances which, by their amalgamation of high politics with magic and sorcery, must be accounted one of the strangest phenomena of the recent past. In them modern diplomacy joined hands with necromancy, the supreme business of State with magic spells, constitutional reforms with "miraculous bells" that sounded whenever the Emperor encountered an "evil person." At these séances the policy of all the Russias was jointly decided by ministers and magicians.

At this period the Empress was enduring great suffering on account of the hardly concealed contempt of her mother-in-law and the whole Court, and was being openly reproached in all quarters for not giving the Empire an heir, and thus ful-

filling her duties as the mother of the country. In consequence, the poor woman gradually fell into a morbid condition of fear and nervousness, and was ripe for blind faith in anyone who professed to bring the fulfilment, by a "miracle," of her dearest wish. At this time, the year 1901, during a visit to France, she made the acquaintance of the quack doctor Philippe. He had made an appearance at the house of the Grand Duchess Militsa, then staying at Compiègne, and she introduced him to the Emperor and Empress. This "truly holy man" immediately made a favourable impression, and soon the imperial couple gave him their complete confidence.

Philippe had originally been a butcher's assistant, and his real name was Nizier-Vachot; and however inappropriate it may seem to his trade, he was of a dreamy disposition and spent night after night, with burning cheeks, devouring books on ghostly apparitions, magic, and mysticism, until finally his leaning to the supernatural led to his dismissal as a good-for-nothing, his master having no use for an assistant "who saw ghosts." This was the beginning of Nizier-Vachot's career as a miracle-worker, which was finally to land him in the Court of the Tsars. Almost immediately after his dismissal he set himself up in his native village, which was not far from Lyons, and started to practise miraculous cures. As generally happens in such cases, he was able to boast of a few successes, especially as he was endowed with certain hypnotic gifts. After he had failed in some cures, however, he attracted the attention of the authorities; they started a prosecution; but he was able to turn the political situation to his advantage by securing the support of the nationalists. A little later Count Muraviev-Amurski, the Russian military attaché in Paris, became one of his followers, and introduced him to the Grand Duchess Militsa Nikolaevna.

On his arrival in Russia, Doctor Philippe first played an important part in the drawing-room of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich and then in the Imperial Court itself. Séances under his direction were held almost continuously, at which the Tsar sometimes, and the Tsaritsa more frequently, were present. Meanwhile, the "Montenegrins" were urging that the title of doctor should be granted to Philippe, a distinction to which he

attached great importance. Finally, they succeeded in inducing the Minister for War, Kuropatkin, to grant the French magician the title of military doctor and state counsellor, whereby the medical practice of the doctor seemed to be legally authorized.

The Empress hoped to be able to realize the fulfilment of her ardent desire through Philippe's miraculous power, and she begged the magician to entreat the mercy of God for her, so that the gift of an heir to the throne might be vouchsafed to her. Philippe transferred himself to the Palace of Tsarskoe Selo, and began a series of mystical conjurations through which the Empress was to be blessed with a son. A short time afterwards the glad news spread through the whole Court that the miracle had happened; the Empress ceased to hold official receptions, and put on loose garments. As she moved about in her dark velvet dress all the relations and Court ladies were able to observe with satisfaction that good grounds existed for joyful expectations. The Emperor radiated happiness and contentment, and the happy news spread over the whole Empire.

When the nine months at last came to an end all St. Petersburg awaited from day to day, from hour to hour, the traditional volleys of cannon from the Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul which, according to their number, would announce whether the newborn infant was a son or a daughter. The Empress had not left her rooms for several days, and had remained in bed; before her bedroom door the four Abyssinian guards, in their embroidered robes and white turbans, were stationed to prevent anyone from disturbing the Empress.

But day after day went by, and still the happy event did not take place. Finally, after some opposition, the Court doctor, Professor Ott, received permission to examine the Empress. To the general consternation it appeared that Alexandra was not pregnant at all. As the whole country had been expecting an heir it was naturally impossible to conceal this tragi-comic catastrophe permanently, and countless rumours were immediately flying all over Russia which were not calculated to increase the prestige of the Tsaritsa.

abortion rumors

On the demand of the Governor of the Palace, Rashkovski, the representative of the Okhrana in Paris, made exhaustive

inquiries there about Philippe's past, and ultimately drew up a most devastating report, which he personally submitted to the Minister Zipiagin. The Minister was sufficiently well acquainted with conditions at the Imperial Court to advise Rashkovski to throw his report into the fire. Rashkovski, however, did not take this wise counsel to heart, but submitted the document to the Tsar, which at once brought the imperial displeasure on his head. In spite of all disappointments and evil rumours, the Emperor and Empress maintained their faith in Doctor Philippe, and continued to bestow their favour on the miracle-worker. It was not until some time later that Philippe, loaded with gifts, was sent back to his native country.

On his departure he presented the Empress with a little bell, which he claimed would automatically begin to ring whenever a wicked person approached the imperial couple. He further left a prophecy that was to have great influence in the later course of events: he declared that God would soon send the Empress a new "friend," who would faithfully stand by her in all her troubles.

Soon after his return to France Philippe died, not least through grief over his dismissal, since, after the fine times at Tsarskoe Selo, he could not adjust himself to his simple home surroundings. His followers maintained that he was not dead, but that, after fulfilling his mission on earth, he had ascended to Heaven alive.

The Orthodox clergy had, from the beginning, mostly looked askance at the rise and influence of the foreign miracle-worker. When the Frenchman had departed they thought that the moment had come to bring the imperial couple once more under their own spell. The Court prelate, Father Feofan, who had been among the chief ones to deplore the Emperor's and Empress's estrangement from the Orthodox Church and their submission to the influence of this devilish Western European superstition, considered that it was time to bring the sovereigns back to the native belief in miracles. For this purpose he bethought himself of a genuine Russian miracle-worker, long dead, who, through criminal negligence alone, had not yet been canonized. This was the monk Serafim of Saratov, who had uttered portentous

prophecies at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Father Feofan persuaded the Tsar to order the canonization of Serafim, and, by this pious act, to earn the gratitude of the heavenly powers. The Tsar, urged on by his wife, was at once all enthusiasm for this plan, and pushed on the canonization of Serafim with as much zeal as if it had been the most important State business.

There was much opposition to be overcome before the project could be realized. The most eminent and powerful pillars of Orthodoxy expressed themselves against it, in particular, Pobedonostsev, the Procurator of the Holy Synod. But, finally, those behind the Tsar carried the day, and even succeeded in overcoming Pobedonostsev's objections at an intimate breakfast party.

Thus, on July 30th, 1903, amid splendid ceremonies, the canonization of Serafim was carried out in the presence of the Emperor and Empress. On the eve of the day a gala banquet took place in honour of the Emperor, at which the higher clergy, a large number of State dignitaries, and numerous princes and officials were present; they had flocked to Saratov from all quarters on this occasion, on the correct assumption that their presence at the ceremony would be useful in their careers.

As the night advanced the strange red spots on the Tsaritsa's face, which always betokened excitement, became more and more noticeable. Her breast rose and fell spasmodically, and her eyes had a restless glitter. At midnight she left the table and went out into the garden. There she was awaited by some old priests and the most intimate of her ladies, who conducted her to the holy well by the bones of Serafim. This well was reputed to possess miraculous powers, and the sick, the halt, the blind, and the deaf, as well as sterile women, were many of them said to have found healing in its waters. The Empress had already been convinced of its efficacy by the evidence of her own eyes: on her arrival at Saratov she had been shown a number of peasants of both sexes, who had all formerly suffered from serious afflictions. But now the halt took part in the festival procession without crutches, the blind saw once more, the deaf heard, and the once sterile women carried children in their arms. Alexandra had resolved to test the power of this miraculous immersion.

On her way to the well, accompanied by three priests and her ladies-in-waiting, she first proceeded to the grave of Serafim, where she fell on her knees, and in long, silent prayer entreated the saint to be her advocate with God, that He might fulfil her longing and grant her a son. When her prayer was ended she went on to the sacred well accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting, the priests remaining to pray at the grave. She laid aside her glittering ornaments and her festive array, and in the light of the stars bathed her body in the beneficent waters.

And the miracle happened! In due time the Empress, to the jubilation of her husband and the whole country, gave birth to a son, Alexei.

The clergy were triumphant, since they attributed the happy event solely to the blessed and miraculous power of the saint of Saratov. The high officials and dignitaries who had flocked from all parts of the Empire for the canonization of Serafim were not disappointed in their expectations. They received distinctions, and rapidly advanced in their careers, for their Majesties were convinced that this canonization had been pleasing to God and, therefore, rewarded all who had taken part in it, since the Almighty had so richly rewarded them. A large picture of the sainted Serafim was hung in the Tsar's study, and the Tsar's faith in this patron saint was in future so strong that, during the war with Japan, he sent thousands of images of Serafim to the troops at the front. "The Japanese have shells," said a mordant witticism of the period; "our soldiers have pictures of the saints."

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In spite of the ascendancy of Serafim, there were many in the Empress's entourage who believed that the merit for the birth of the heir-apparent should be attributed less to him than to another wonder-working personage. These people asserted that the nocturnal immersion in the holy well might perhaps have helped the miracle, but that in reality it had been brought about solely through the "holy fool," the afflicted peasant girl, Daria Ossipova. For immediately after the dismissal of Philippe, other "miracle-workers" and "mediators" appeared at the Imperial Court, of whom it was affirmed that they were able to fulfil the

Empress's wish through magical influences. Unlike the Frenchman, however, these miracle-workers were not cultured doctors and "drawing-room magicians," but belonged rather to the specific Russian type of "Iurodivye," "holy idiots." These were purely native phenomena, as old and highly respected as the Orthodox priests themselves.

Such "Iurodivye" were frequently to be met with in the villages; they were generally men (more seldom women) physically and mentally deficient and, in most cases, also afflicted with epilepsy. The people regarded the very simplicity of these village idiots as a special sign of God, and their "falling sickness" strengthened their reputation for sanctity. Among the intelligentsia, as well as among the peasants, a belief had long existed that the Lord found particular pleasure in deformed persons, deaf mutes, epileptics, and idiots, and that the spirit of God loved to reveal itself in the solecisms, meaningless sounds, wild cries, and convulsive movements of such creatures.

When one of these "Iurodivye," barefooted, dirty, and clad only in a torn smock, appeared in the village street, the peasants knelt before him, kissed the hem of his shirt, and listened absorbedly to his confused talk, so that they might interpret the will of God therefrom.

One of these "miraculous idiots" was brought to Tsarskoe Selo by persons who speculated skilfully on the mystical tendencies of the sovereigns. This was Mitia Koliaba, also called Mitia Kozelski, a simple cripple belonging to the district of the famous monastery of Optina Pustyn. He was bandy-legged, deformed, almost dumb, and had only two monstrous stumps for arms. He had to be led, as his sight was very weak; his hearing was rudimentary, and his speech mostly consisted of a few hideous sounds which he produced jerkily with painful efforts. When he was seized by an epileptic attack and began to cry out, his voice sounded now like a dismal whining, now like a hideous croaking, and finally degenerated into a terrifying and fearsome yowling and yelping. The repulsive impression made by these sounds was further increased by the crazy waving of his stumps, so that good nerves were needed to endure the presence of this idiot.

The peasants of his home district had at first merely given him food out of sympathy, without any idea that the animal noises he made could be interpreted as prophecies. It was the monks of Optina Pustyn, the monastery to which Dostoevski raised an immortal monument in his *Brothers Karamazov*, who first discovered Mitia Koliaba's wonderful capacities. Although they were not yet able to interpret the meanings of his cries and mutterings, they nevertheless immediately recognized that here was a "fool in Christ," a seer in an ecstasy of God. The key to interpret Mitia's oracles was later granted "by special illumination" to one of the "humbler brotherhood," Egorov, the sexton and psalm-singer. As he prayed before the ikon of St. Nicholas, the voice of the saint had revealed to him the secret meaning of Mitia's sounds, and had ordered him to put in writing the hitherto hidden method of interpretation of these prophecies. The wonderful voice added that the fool, Mitia Koliaba, was fated to have a great influence on the destiny of Russia.

After this the psalm-singer Egorov became the inseparable companion of the wonder-idiot and the interpreter of his oracles. Soon afterwards Mitia happened to prophesy to a distinguished lady that she would give birth to a son, which event actually came to pass. The fame of this incident penetrated to St. Petersburg and was generally discussed and marvelled at, especially in the salon of the pious Countess Ignatiev. Some of the members of this distinguished circle had the idea of bringing the holy fool to the Imperial Court, so that he might exercise his office there and, by his miraculous powers, help the Empress to produce a son. Prince Obolenski, who had an estate in the neighbourhood of Kozelsk, and who thus had personal experience of the activities of the idiot, at once undertook to bring him and his interpreter to Tsarskoe Selo.

One day, then, Mitia Koliaba and Egorov appeared in the drawing-room of the "Montenegrins," and after a friendly reception there were presented to the Emperor and Empress. Mitia was inspired and endowed with miraculous powers only during his epileptic fits; at other times he was an ordinary fool, who conducted himself in an unseemly fashion and whom no one could manage. This was the reason why he never acquired a

really important position at Court, as the other miracle-workers easily contrived to do.

But when Mitia was suffering from one of the attacks that made him "clairvoyant," Egorov stood by him and by means of his "key," interpreted the screeching, mumbling, croaking, yowling, and yelping sounds that proceeded from the idiot's mouth, and the hideous waving of his stumps. In the presence of the Tsar, the Tsaritsa, and the Montenegrins questions were put to this imbecile as he writhed in convulsions, to which he replied with incomprehensible noises, foaming at the mouth. It was then Egorov's turn to interpret this prophesying; but to all questions about the prospective birth of an heir to the throne only evasive answers could be given: "It is still early days, it is still long before the birth, and Mitia cannot say whether it will be a girl or a boy. But he is praying unceasingly, and in course of time will give exact information." And, however often these curious séances were repeated, the fool and his companion could not be induced to give further details. It seemed that the miraculous idiot completely failed in this case, and the only result of the séances was that the Empress was driven to fits of hysterical weeping by Mitia's ear-piercing roars and frightful gesticulations.

In consequence, the "Iurodivye" was abandoned in disappointment, with all the more reason since, in the meantime, General Orlov had succeeded in finding a new miracle-worker on his estate, this time an imbecile woman called Daria Ossipova. When her attacks came on, this "holy fool" did not confine herself to prophecies; her shrieks in themselves had magical powers, and could give fecundity. Even in her home district, where she was in service on an estate, she had been able to "avert the evil eye" from the peasants, to bless women with children, cure hopeless invalids, and also to curse her enemies. The village honoured and feared her, for they looked on her as one of those real and genuine witches who had unfortunately almost all died out. When in the throes of an attack she had to be tied up with rope, for in a mad frenzy she struck out at everything within her reach. And in this state she did not merely utter unintelligible cries, like Mitia Koliaba, but quite understandable words of

abuse and curses of the worst kind. Nevertheless, the people listened to her words with reverent attention, for was it not just when she conducted herself in this mad way that Heaven poured its grace into her and enabled her to prophesy and work miracles? It was at the very time that Daria Ossipova was brought to Tsarskoe Selo and terrified the poor Empress with her abominable curses that the "miracle" happened and the heir to the throne arrived. As the canonization of Serafim had also taken place shortly before, opinions were divided on whether the happy event should be attributed to Saint Serafim or to the "divine fool," Daria Ossipova.

The Empress had become so used to associating with all sorts of miracle-workers that very soon she did not confine herself to imploring them to fulfil her desire for a son, but, along with the Emperor, sought the aid of such magicians and miraculous idiots in State affairs also. Philippe had already been drawn into important political discussions, and later the Emperor used to ask Mitia Koliaba for his "advice" before he made a serious decision. During the war with Japan Mitia was more than once summoned to the Tsar's rooms, so that his stammering prayers might avert disaster from the army. Nikolai received him again in 1906; the fact is noted in his diary.

The strannik, Antoni, the successor of Daria Ossipova at Tsarskoe Selo, also functioned temporarily as a political magician and clairvoyant in the days of the first Duma. He was followed by ever fresh crowds of "pilgrims" and "penitents," who were all asked for their "inspired counsel" in political affairs.

Although in this way the native element gained an increasing predominance, the famous French "magician," Papus, the Paris gynecologist, Dr. Encausse, also played a certain part from time to time. He appeared in St. Petersburg for the first time in 1900, when he was mostly seen in the company of his friend Philippe. At the beginning of October 1905 Papus, after a longish absence, was again summoned to the capital to support the sovereign in the difficult position caused by the Revolution. The Tsar's advisers were not at that time unanimous about what course the Government should pursue, whether they should yield to the demands of the insurgents, or whether they should stand up to

them and make no concessions. Papus, at a séance, conjured up the spirit of Alexander III, to whom the Tsar addressed a number of questions. Influenced not least by the information obtained at this séance, Nikolai II finally decided to sign the ukase summoning the Imperial Duma.

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One of the most curious phenomena of the Russian Imperial Court, however, was the "doctor of Tibetan medicine," Badmaev, a singular personality who towered above the crowd of home-produced magicians and clairvoyants. All these other "thaumaturges," "miraculous idiots," and "mystagogues" were peculiar people only when in a state of "inspiration," when they were attacked by the "holy frenzy" that endowed them with supernatural insight.

The abilities of the Tibetan magician, Badmaev, on the contrary, were of a far higher kind: they did not depend on accidents, séances, inspirations, or attacks of disease, but were rooted in a "secret knowledge," established and studied for centuries, the ancient "sublime tradition of Tibetan wisdom." In his Mongolian home Badmaev had been initiated into the mysteries of the miraculous healing art and of magic, and this enabled him at all times to discern the hidden forces in the ordering of destiny and to bend them to his will. He passed at Court for one of the last of the "wise men of the East" and, therefore, met with more consideration and reverence than all the other "empirical" miracle-workers.

The political counsels and oracles of this Tibetan were very highly valued by the Tsar. Badmaev did not need to call up the ghost of Alexander III when grave problems of State had to be decided; he was himself a man of great political experience and knowledge of the world, familiar with all the subtleties of Asiatic diplomacy. In the counsels he gave the Tsar, ostensible magic was combined with real diplomatic shrewdness, for his eye grasped with unerring keenness not only the "inner light" of things, but also their real meaning and practical importance. Thus it was that, while all the other miracle-workers often failed and had to retire ingloriously one after the other, Badmaev was able to maintain his prestige and confidential position right up to

the overthrow of the imperial regime. Unlike the long series of rival "prophets" and "miraculous idiots," the Tibetan magician in his white smock and high white cap remained a permanent figure of outstanding personal influence. There was a time in the history of Russian politics when not only the imperial couple but the ministers and administrative officials as well were entirely under the sway of Badmaev, and when many important measures were taken in accordance with the prescriptions of his "secret science."

This singular man belonged to Transbaikalia, and was the son of a Buriat; he had grown up on the steppes, then attended the grammar school at Irkutsk, and afterwards St. Petersburg University, where he studied the Chinese-Mongolian languages. It was at this time that he was converted to the Orthodox faith, and exchanged his Buriat christian name of Shamzaran for the Russian name, Petr Alexandrovich. The Emperor Alexander III himself acted as godfather, having thus early recognized the great abilities of the young man. This imperial sponsorship gave him the right of entry to the Court for life, and the rare favour of being allowed to write direct to the monarch.

In the year 1875, on the completion of his university career, he entered the civil service, and until 1893 held a regular post in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs; he was at the same time lecturer in Mongolian at St. Petersburg University. He was repeatedly entrusted with special commissions of a political nature, in cases where an exact knowledge of Eastern Asiatic conditions was required; there are frequent references to this in the diaries of Nikolai II. One such note reads: "After breakfast I discussed Mongolian affairs with Badmaev."

At the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Badmaev was entrusted with the mission of winning over the Mongolian tribal chiefs to the Russian cause; he was given two hundred thousand roubles for purposes of bribery. He discharged his task with great skill and remarkable success, although envious persons maintained that he had contrived to get on without bribes, and to divert the two hundred thousand roubles to his own pocket.

Shamzaran Badmaev affirmed that he had acquired an exact knowledge of the secret doctrines of "Tibetan magic" and medical

science in his father's house, as this knowledge was an ancient tradition in his family. His elder brother Zaltin had also studied "Asiatic medicine," and had practised as a "Tibetan apothecary" in St. Petersburg since the sixties, but at that time his clientèle was very sparse. Petr Alexandrovich practised in his brother's shop, and it was through him that the business first began really to flourish. Very soon Petr Alexandrovich overtopped his elder brother and, when later he took over the management of it himself, this obscure little shop became a great "sanatorium." The fame of Badmaev's magical cures spread rapidly, and clients flocked to him from all classes of society, seeking to be cured in his sanatorium. His followers maintained that he could charm away the most stubborn troubles in a marvellous fashion, and that his curative treatment was particularly successful "in serious cases of stubborn nervous diseases, mental maladies, and disturbances of the female physiology."

The laboratory of the sanatorium was fitted up according to the rules of the "Tibetan magical art"; only the master himself had the entry to it, and there, in complete seclusion, with the aid of magic crucibles and mysterious formulæ, he prepared his various alchemic remedies, "infusions of asoka flowers," "nivrik powder," "Nienchen balsam," "black lotus essence," and "Tibetan elixir of life." He had established a whole pharmacopœia of his own of drugs, tinctures, and mixtures with mysterious, magical labels that were supposed to indicate the method of preparation to the initiated; but only the master himself was able to interpret these labels, and the invaders who took possession of his laboratory after the Revolution found themselves confronted with a chaos of incomprehensible names, perplexing memoranda, and useless apparatus to which they lacked any key.

But what completely distinguished Doctor Badmaev's sanatorium from all the other curative institutions in the world was its political character. Anyone who had once been a patient there, no matter for what reason, was immediately placed on the list of candidates for ministerial posts or other high positions in the State. The decoctions, potions, and powders brewed by Badmaev from the strange herbs of the steppes served not only to remove the physiological disorders of his patients, but also to give them

an immediate claim to important State offices. For the Emperor had gradually got into the habit, not only of asking Badmaev's advice, but also of appointing high officials, as occasion arose, on his recommendation, of procuring them, as it were, from the Badmaev sanatorium.

The party affiliations and political views of every patient at his institution were carefully noted on his chart, and next to his name, between two mysterious Tibetan prescriptions, was often to be found a note such as "The right wing must be strengthened," which referred not to the lungs,* but to the Duma. Badmaev kept up an active correspondence with his patients after their treatment was over, in which, in addition to medical advice on, say, blood pressure or constipation, he also gave them political instructions.

In the course of time medicine and politics, ministerial appointments and "lotus essences," became more and more involved in each other, resulting in a fantastic political sorcery that had its origin in the Badmaev sanatorium, and that decided the destiny of all the Russias.

This quack doctor owed his great influence to the success of his medico-political treatment of the Tsar, for whom he had been able not only to cure an abdominal complaint, but also to solve technical administrative dilemmas. For the stomach trouble he prescribed a decoction of Tibetan herbs, surmised to be a mixture of henbane and hashish, the effects of which were marvellous; the political difficulties of the sovereign he treated with a suitable dose of diplomatic skill and statesmanlike insight, and here, too, the results were satisfactory. In consequence, Badmaev rose higher and higher in the esteem of the imperial couple, and all the attempts of his opponents to make things unpleasant for him, to overthrow him, or to set the police on him, were doomed to failure beforehand. The Minister Khvostov, who had tried in vain to take steps against him, had to recognize that the Tibetan's excellent relations with the imperial family made him practically unassailable.

Even in 1917, after the imperial regime had been overthrown,

* The Russian word "Krylo," wing, also means the lobe of the lung. (*Translators' note.*)

the power of this unique personality was proved; Badmaev was arrested and imprisoned by the Council of Sailors of the Baltic Squadron on his way to Finland with Madame Vyrubova and the adventurer Manasevich-Manuilov. But it was not long before his original and dignified bearing and his many successful cures won him the affection of the prison warders, and he was treated not as their prisoner, but as their friend.

The art of the Tibetan magician, however, failed in the very case in which it was most important to be successful: even he was unable to cure the malady of the little Tsesarevich; here his magical potions and formulæ had not the slightest effect. Grief and helpless despair continued as before to surround the sick-bed of Alexei, until the day when Grigori Efimovich Rasputin first appeared at the bedside of the unfortunate boy.

CHAPTER VI

THE FRIEND

IT was the third day that Alexandra Fedorovna, Empress of Russia, had spent by the bedside of her sick son; with her hands convulsively clenched together she had been gazing hour after hour, her face motionless and despairing, at the suffering child. A week before, on that unlucky morning when the athletic sailor Derevenko had brought in, in his strong arms, the body of Alexei doubled up with pain and almost lifeless, she had fallen in a dead faint, overcome with unutterable grief.

How anxiously everyone around him had watched over Alesha since his last attack; what infinite care had been spent in protecting him from another accident! But in spite of all, it had happened once more! The little boy had been playing in the park with the son of his attendant, carefully watched by Derevenko and his nurse Vishniakova. But Alesha, jumping up suddenly, had made a careless, impetuous movement, and had fallen back, pale as death, into the arms of the sailor who had rushed up to him.

After they had laid him on his bed and tenderly undressed him, they saw those terrible blue swellings which were the signs of the internal hemorrhage so dangerous to his life. The child lay with one leg, cramped in agony, drawn up against his body, and his nose stood out sharply from his waxen, yellow face, like the nose of a corpse. The doctors called in by the Emperor in his despair had hurried to the Palace, examined the little patient, applied this and that remedy, held consultations, made fresh examinations, but in the end had to confess their impotence. The potions of the Tibetan magician, administered by the Empress, failed entirely. It was as if God intended to try to the uttermost the Empress of Russia, so envied by all the women in her realm: even Badmaev's magic herbs could not relieve the

sufferings of the Tsesarevich! And Alexandra threw herself down by the sick-bed and implored God in fervid prayer to work a miracle, this once more, and save her son from death.

Day followed day, night followed night, and still it seemed that the Almighty was reluctant to let the miracle happen. Alexei's suffering increased and the pains grew worse and worse. At the outset there had been times when the boy had talked with his tutor, Gilliard, or with his governess, until the pain started afresh. But now there were no such intervals; the child cried and moaned unceasingly, and no one in the Palace dared to approach the sickroom.

From time to time Alesha sank into exhausted silence, and the anxiety of the agonized mother increased; she thought that now death would snatch her son at any moment. The Tsar frequently came into the sick-room to comfort his Alix. Once the boy felt a cool hand on his forehead; waking out of semiconsciousness he drew down his father's head with his little, emaciated hands and whispered in his ear in a soft, sighing voice: "Papa, if I die, let me be buried out there in the Park."

The Emperor, after freeing himself cautiously from the child's clinging arms, rushed to the door, and the Empress heard him burst into loud sobs.

Alexandra sat motionless by the bed, worn out by her long nursing, hopeless, but not yet resigned to fate. She had ceased to pray, convinced that God would no longer listen to her; she waited there with staring eyes, till twilight began to fall. Since Alexei's accident she had scarcely left the sick-room; she had not taken off her clothes or lain down. Her hair was unkempt and neglected; her beautiful face was hollow, pale, and twisted like the careworn face of an old woman; her inflamed eyes were lustreless and expressionless, as if she had wept too much to be able to shed another tear.

Suddenly someone knocked at the door, and then a second and a third time. As no one answered, the door opened almost noiselessly and Stana, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna, came in. In her torpor the Empress had remained unaware either of the knock or the entry, and she did not awaken from her apathetic reverie until she saw the flushed face of the Grand

Duchess close to her own. Then she heard the coaxing, caressing words such as only Stana and her sister, Militsa, knew how to use.

For a while the Empress listened in silence; then at last she again found relief in tears; her body relaxed and, sobbing, she flung her arms round Stana's neck. Stana stroked her, comforted her, kissed her, knelt at her feet, embraced her knees, laid her head in her lap. With a flood of soothing words, the Grand Duchess gradually managed to rouse the interest and attention of the Tsaritsa. She assured her that Alexei would soon be quite well again, and everything else would also take a turn for the better. The Tsaritsa herself would win the love of the people, and the malicious old Court ladies and ministers would sink in shame for their base intriguing; a time of wonderful happiness was coming for all Russia, such as she had never yet known.

Stana went on in rapid, excited whispers, jumping from one subject to another, to tell of the amazing Siberian peasant, the holy pilgrim, whom she and Militsa had met a few days before. He was a quite extraordinary man, far cleverer and endowed with far greater divine powers than even M. Philippe and Dr. Badmaev. Without blasphemy she might say that this peasant surpassed even John of Kronstadt in holiness; this opinion was not only that of herself and her sister; the sainted John had himself asserted it.

The Grand Duchess, in hurried words, then told how, the other day, at mass, John of Kronstadt, in the presence of the most distinguished ladies, the élite of the society of the capital, had publicly extolled the simple muzhik, Grigori Efimovich, as a man endowed with the grace of God. It had happened in this way: Father John had just finished the service; he had, as usual, preached marvellously and the church was filled to the doors. The most magnificent toilettes were to be seen, and many ladies had appeared in the long gloves "which are now coming into fashion." At the end of the mass the priest, with the sacraments in his hand, had uttered the usual words: "Approach in faith and in the fear of God." But, as all the ladies were pressing forward to receive the communion and the blessing of the saint, a strange thing happened! Stana was uncommonly grieved

that she herself had not been present. She had intended to go to mass at Kronstadt that day; but at the last moment a visitor had come in and she had had to give up the idea.

But to continue: as the ladies crowded up to Father John, he stepped forward before the altar with shining eyes, raised his right hand, and cried in a powerful voice: "Stop! to-day we have a worthier among us who must partake first of the Holy Communion—the simple pilgrim who stands there in your midst." He indicated an ordinary muzhik at the back of the church, where the beggars and the blind and halt are accustomed to follow the mass. Startled, they all turned round to see the man pointed out by Father John. He was really an ordinary peasant in a common sheepskin coat, with heavy, greased boots, a pilgrim's staff in his hand, and a coarse bread-bag on his back. Nevertheless, the ladies, at least according to the account of Countess Ignatiev, from whom Stana had had all the details, did not fail to note what splendid eyes this peasant had, eyes such as they had never seen in any human head. But the most extraordinary thing was his behaviour. It might have been thought that being specially distinguished by Father John would have confused him; but the wonderful man did not even seem surprised, much less embarrassed; he had quietly stepped up to the ikonostas, taken the communion, and then had actually blessed the sainted Father John!

This incident naturally caused a great sensation in the salon of the Countess Ignatiev; inquiries were made about the strange pilgrim: where did he come from, and who was he? The Grand Duchess went on to tell the Tsaritsa how the Archimandrite Feofan had met him and talked with him in the corridor of the monastery hostel. Next day Feofan appeared in the salon and told of the impression the Siberian peasant had made both on himself and on Bishop Hermogen and the venerable monk Iliodor. But it was not only these princes of the Church who were enthusiastic over the piety, profound knowledge, and native wisdom of Rasputin; even quite sober, sceptical people, professors, advocates, officers, and officials who had met him at the meeting of the All-Russian Union were fascinated by him, and convinced of his sanctity.

the ranks of the beggars and the poor D. T. on the faces of the poor.

Iliodor has lied at this meeting. He has left a vivid, a dangerous trial, a terrible devil — D. T. remarks on their profound.

Father Feofan had brought this amazing peasant to the Palace of the Grand Duchess Stana and her husband at Sergeevo, and Nikolai Nikolaevich had also liked him enormously. A deputation of the "true Russian people" had waited upon the Grand Duke, and begged him to have the new saint brought to Tsarskoe Selo and introduced to the imperial couple. They believed that from this peasant spoke "the voice of the Russian soil," the soul of the holy Russian people. And it had never been so necessary to listen to the voice of the people as now, when the "nefarious activities of the revolutionaries were imperilling the throne and the Orthodox Church." The Tsar and Tsaritsa were surrounded by false and untrustworthy courtiers, who were coquetting in their hearts with the pernicious ideas of the "Westerners"; therefore, it was all the more important that a true representative of the Russian people should for once make his voice heard at Court.

Stana herself thought that she could not but recommend this proposal to the Empress: the "true Russian people" were indeed the truest and most faithful pillars of the monarchy and, if they advocated any course to the Tsar, they undoubtedly acted solely in the interest of the throne and the dynasty. Nikolai and Alix were quite right to distrust their hypocritical entourage, who tried to conceal from them the nation's real interests. The peasant, Grigori Efimovich, was, however, a genuine Russian, and moreover, a sincere, Orthodox Christian; he knew the people, their objects and wishes, and he was bound to be in a better position than anyone else to advise the Emperor wisely on what was to be done to check the hateful anarchists.

But it was even more important that Grigori Rasputin was possessed of wonderful healing powers and could cure hopeless invalids. Stana was absolutely convinced of this, because a simple but respectable and God-fearing middle-class woman, the widow Bashmakova, had come to St. Petersburg to tell how Grigori Efimovich, before his arrival in the capital, had been honoured in his Siberian home as a saint and a miracle-worker, how mothers with sick children, and men and women with incurable diseases, had flocked to him and come away cured. The widow herself had given the whole of her not inconsiderable

fortune for charitable purposes, as a thank-offering for her cure by Father Grigori.

Besides, the personal impression Rasputin had made on Stana was overwhelming, and not only on her, but on her husband also; her sister and her brother-in-law had been convinced of his holiness immediately they met him. Since then Grigori Efimovich had been a regular visitor, not only at Stana's house, but also at that of Militsa and her husband, Peter Nikolaevich. Yesterday, when he had been at Stana's again, she had told him how ill the poor Tsesarevich was and how Alix was in despair over it. Whereupon, as Stana announced to the Empress, beaming with happiness and enthusiasm, the miracle-worker had answered: "Just tell the Empress not to weep any more. I will make her youngster well again! Once he is a soldier, he will have red cheeks again!"

For the first time in many days the Empress smiled. At first Alix had hardly listened, so sunk was she in grief and anxiety; but as Stana went on, she began to attend, at first only half-consciously, and at last she grasped what was being said: this peasant was trying to protect the Emperor, herself, and little Alexei from the attacks of the revolutionaries, to save Russia and the Orthodox Church, and to make her dear Alexei, her only son, well again! Slowly the colour returned to her pale, weary face, and life and light to her eyes. And when Stana began to imitate Rasputin's comical way of talking and to reproduce his own words with the peasant accent, she could not help smiling. Everything this peasant said about "making well," and "red cheeks" sounded so simple and sincere that Alexandra already felt drawn to him. She became possessed by a strong desire to meet this unique man, and decided to talk to the Emperor about it that very day.

Stana, noticing that she had succeeded in rousing the Empress from her grief and in awakening her interest in "Father Grigori," became enthusiastic. In impressive language she described Grigori's appearance, and especially his eyes and the wonderful look in them. She spoke of the compelling force that lay in his gaze, and that made you at once forget that you were talking to a common peasant. The Grand Duchess stopped

clasping the Empress's knees, and accompanied her description with animated gestures; as she repeated his words she sketched in the air the form and attitudes of the new saint. Her vivid and spirited description, and the ecstatic faith that breathed from her, gradually carried the Empress away.

Meanwhile it had become dark in the sick-room, and only a faint glimmer of light came from the window.

"Do you remember, Alix," the Grand Duchess continued, "what Dr. Philippe said to you when he had to leave you all? He prophesied that God would send you a new friend to help and protect you. Believe me, Alix, this is he, this is the friend whom Philippe foretold. He will save Russia and make your son well again. God has sent him to you!"

As she stared into the dark room Alexandra imagined that she saw the new "friend" in the flesh before her eyes. He stepped up to the bed, and raised his hand over the sick child as if in blessing. "He will make your son well again," cried Stana, and her voice was now no longer soft, but loud and clear. The Empress also began to speak aloud:

"How good you are to me, Stana. You and Militsa are the only ones who are good to me."

And she pressed Stana's hand with the fervour and vehemence with which unhappy people express their love and gratitude.

The nurse came in to light the lamp, and the Tsar followed soon afterwards. They were both surprised at the change in the Empress: she was almost gay, and said she would dine downstairs again.

The Emperor, deeply moved, kissed Stana's hand. "She and Militsa," thought he, "are our only true friends among our relations. And yet people are always trying to make bad blood between us." The Emperor was continually being warned that the "Montenegrins" had a bad influence on the Tsaritsa, that they were uneducated, superstitious, and ill-bred—in a word, that, in spite of their education in the Smolny Convent, they had remained "peasants," as was only to be expected of the daughters of a peasant prince. Count Witte, in particular, with his everlasting nagging, was continually bringing forward fresh complaints and fresh warnings; he never tired of reiterating that

Stana's and Militsa's affection for the Empress was inspired by purely selfish motives. But he had known well enough what to think of all these intrigues. He knew enough of his courtiers and ministers, and despised them, wretched creatures whose one object was to insinuate themselves and drive out everyone else. Their objections to Stana and Militsa were nothing but slanders, in his opinion! And now that Stana had succeeded in cheering his beloved Alix the Emperor was firmer than ever in this opinion.

When Alexandra appeared at table, Anastasia began immediately to give the Emperor a lengthy account of the Siberian man of God, Grigori Efimovich. The three of them discussed the matter at length, and Alix permitted the Grand Duchess to repeat all that she had told her about the pilgrim. For the first time for days the imperial couple felt in a somewhat hopeful mood.

Even when the Tsaritsa hurried back to the sick-room and found the Tsesarevich still lying moaning, pale as death, with his legs drawn up against his body, she was, in spite of everything, more light-hearted and could now at least hope again that everything would ultimately turn out well. She went to the bedside and pondered long over the words that M. Philippe had spoken before he departed. Had the moment really come, and had God at last heard her fervent prayers and sent her a new helper, a new "friend"?

A day or two later Nikolai and Alexandra were sitting in the Emperor's study. It was almost nine o'clock in the evening, and Alix was impatiently counting the minutes; several times she went to the door to listen, thinking she heard footsteps, and ran to her husband's writing-table, crying excitedly, "He is coming." But no! the clock on the mantelpiece had already struck nine and the eagerly expected guest had not yet appeared. The Empress was seized with impatience and fear; her breath began to come in short gasps, and her cheeks displayed the dangerous red patches.

The Tsar, too, was nervous: he turned over the pile of documents and reports spread out on his table, and tried in vain to read them. They were reports of new risings, murderous attacks

and mutinies, ukases to be signed proclaiming martial law in this or that part of the Empire. What trouble these new revolutionary ideas were causing! The Emperor was no longer able to finish his daily task in his usual working hours, but had to sit at his desk till far into the night.

This evening, however, he could not get on with his work at all. Although he was able to suppress his agitation in order not to make Alix uneasy, he was secretly very impatient at the long waiting. For he, like the Empress, had been deeply impressed by what he had heard of the peasant Grigori Efimovich. Although Father Grigori was a simple peasant, he had a way of being natural and sincere, of looking you straight and openly in the eyes, that was bound to prepossess you in his favour from the start; his shrewd talk had amazed Nikolai and Alix. As, in imagination, he passed in review his ministers, generals, and adjutants, he found among them no face that seemed to him so innocent, friendly, and kind as that of Grigori Rasputin. This simple peasant had said at once that he was prepared to help Alesha, and this undertaking had already calmed Alix surprisingly. If he would only come! Stana had promised to bring him in her carriage from Sergeevo to Tsarskoe Selo, so that he should have arrived by nine o'clock at the latest.

The Emperor rose and laid his hand on his wife's shoulder: "Don't worry, Sunshine," he said, "there is not the slightest reason to be nervous."

The most minute precautions had been taken to bring the Siberian miracle-worker unostentatiously to Tsarskoe Selo. If Father Grigori had come to the Palace in the ordinary way through the reception rooms, he would have had to pass through three controls, the Palace police, the convoy, and the combined police guards. He would, like everybody else who wanted an audience with the Emperor, have been stopped at least twenty times and questioned about the object of his visit. His name would have been entered in twenty different books. There would have been telephoning and inquiries of the Governor of the Palace, and even the answer of this supreme functionary would have had to pass through several hands before the visitor was

admitted. And any one of these officials might raise "objections" and turn the visitor away.

For the Emperor and Empress were surrounded by a manifold cordon of spies in uniform and mufti; every step the imperial couple took was watched, spied on, and noted in twenty different registers. How often Alix had said gloomily to her husband: "We are prisoners here, Niki dear."

But this time all possible measures had been taken to prevent such vexatious delays. A side entrance at the back of the Palace was to be used to admit Rasputin into the royal apartments unobserved. This entrance led to a back stair which was generally closed, and there Maria Vishniakova, the faithful and trustworthy attendant of the Tsesarevich, was awaiting the arrival of Rasputin and would conduct him through the dark passage and up the staircase to the Tsar's rooms. He was to be brought to this side entrance under the protection of the Grand Duchess Stana, whose arrival would excite no particular surprise in the few guards stationed at the back of the Palace, as she was a frequent visitor at Tsarskoe Selo.

As the Tsar was once more about to explain to his wife all the reasons why she need not be anxious, the door opened unexpectedly, and Grigori Efimovich, the Siberian peasant, in long, black caftan, with his great beard and untidy hair, appeared in the Tsar's study. Vishniakova came in behind him. She had her hands folded over her stomach, as simple women do when they are astonished; with her wide-open eyes and her half-opened mouth, she was a picture of amazement. She was so carried away that she was apparently quite unconscious that she was in the presence of the Emperor and Empress.

As he entered Grigori Efimovich looked graciously round to his guide, noticed her amazed face, and cried with a grin: "Now then, my good soul, what are *you* gaping at?"

Shock at this mode of address recalled the nurse to a sense of where she was, and she was overcome with confusion; blushing to the roots of her hair, she rapidly made a deep curtsey and retired as fast as she could. But, while she was still in the doorway, she witnessed a scene that kept her rooted to where she

stood: Grigori Efimovich went up to the imperial couple with a beaming smile and, without ceremony, embraced the all-powerful ruler of all the Russias and his consort, and gave them a smacking kiss!

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In the Tsesarevich's nurseries another sleepless night was expected, a night full of grief and anxiety, and the necessary preparations had been made, when suddenly Grigori Efimovich came softly into the sick-room, followed by the Empress and Vishniakova. Alesha was lying in bed, pale as death, his little face twisted with pain, and his legs still drawn up stiffly against his breast. Even when Vishniakova went up to him and gently asked how he felt, the half-conscious boy made no movement, and only moaned slightly.

As soon as he entered Rasputin fell on his knees before the sacred ikons in the corner of the room, and prayed in a low voice; then he rose, went up to the child's bed, and, bending down, made the sign of the cross over him. Alesha opened his eyes and looked wonderingly at the queer stranger with the great beard, who smiled at him so seriously and yet so kindly. He even shrank a little under the gaze of this unknown man; but he immediately felt that the man certainly meant him no harm.

"Now, don't be afraid, Alesha, everything is all right again," said the stranger, in a pleasant and melodious voice that was kind and firm. To the feverish boy it was as if a divine voice spoke to him. "Look, Alesha," went on the stranger, stroking the child's whole body from head to foot, "look, I have driven all *your* horrid pains away. Nothing will hurt *you* any more, and to-morrow *you* will be well again. Then *you* will see what jolly games we'll have together!"

The awkwardly caressing movement of the big coarse hand gradually cheered the still rather frightened child, and he began to smile, while the stranger went on talking in a more and more urgent voice: "When I was as little as *you* I played the most wonderful games, which I'm sure *you* don't know; but I'll teach *you* them." And Grigori told the boy of the mad pranks he used to play at home, in his Siberian village, with the other

peasant children. He spoke about the enormous size of Siberia: it was so large that no one had ever seen the end of it! And all this country belonged to Alesha's papa and mamma, and one day, when he was healthy, strong, and big, it would belong to him. It was full of huge forests and endless steppes, and the people there were quite different from the people in St. Petersburg.

The kind stranger sat down on the edge of the bed and took the child's hand in his big peasant's hands and stroked it. He promised Alesha that when he was well again, he would take him to Siberia and show him everything he himself had seen there. For he had seen everything, lands and men, that no one but himself had ever seen. The boy listened to these tales with growing attention; his eyes became bigger and bigger and began to shine. He had quite forgotten he was ill, and thought no more about his pains; his legs gradually relaxed, and he raised his body higher on the pillow into a sitting position, in order to get a better view of the face of the dark-bearded stranger.

The Empress, who had remained quietly in the background, rushed anxiously forward at this movement, fearing that the child might do himself a fresh injury by leaning on his arms. "Take care, Alesha," she cried apprehensively, "*you* know *you* must be careful."

"Leave me alone, Mama! I must listen," answered the child, and turning to Grigori Efimovich, he added with childish eagerness: "Please, please, tell me another story."

Rasputin smiled approvingly. "*You* are quite right, Alesha," he said in his friendly way, "nothing can hurt *you* now. Nothing will happen when I am with *you*."

And he told him more about Siberia, and then began to tell fairy tales. The child listened excitedly to the stories of the hump-backed horses, of the legless rider and the eyeless rider, of Alenushka and Ivanushka, of the unfaithful Tsarevna, who was turned into a white duck, the Tsesarevich Vassili and the beautiful princess Elena. Grigori Efimovich spoke of the life of the flowers of the vast Siberian steppes, where even the flowers and the old trees of the forest have a soul and can speak to each other.

other. The animals, too, had a language, he said, and he himself as a child had learned to understand what the horses in the stable whispered to each other.

"Do *you* hear, Maria," said the child enthusiastically to his nurse, "I've always told *you* that the animals can speak. But *you* are so stupid and know nothing about it."

Vishniakova, who was herself fascinated by Rasputin's tales and had continued to gaze marvellingly at him, merely nodded assent.

"But we both know," said the Tsesarevich, smiling mysteriously at Grigori, "that the animals can speak! And *you* will tell me everything *you* heard from the horses, won't *you?*"

It was now very late, so Rasputin said smilingly: "To-morrow, Alesha. I'll tell *you* more to-morrow."

The Empress assured her son that the good little father would come back to-morrow evening for certain; but many reassuring words were necessary before the child resigned himself to hearing no more then. He no longer felt any pain, and would have preferred to listen all night to his new friend. After Grigori Efimovich had said good-bye and, while he was still in the doorway, Alexei shouted eagerly after him: "Come to-morrow for sure, little father. I will not go to sleep till *you* come." And even after the door had closed behind his visitor, the boy continued to gaze with a look of radiant happiness at the place where the good man with the big beard had disappeared.

"Who is he, Maria?" he asked Vishniakova at last.

"A holy pilgrim," she replied, herself still absent-minded and dreamy. "A holy man who will make *you* well again. God Himself has sent him to *your* papa and mama."

"A holy man," repeated the child, as his eyelids drooped, overcome by the need of sleep.

When Grigori Efimovich had left the sick-room, the Empress almost burst into tears of emotion and gratitude; she impetuously seized the hands of the peasant and kissed them.

But Rasputin made the sign of the cross over her, and said: "Believe in the power of my prayers, and *your* son will live."

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Grigori returned next night and the following nights; the

clumsy Siberian peasant and the little son of the Tsar were soon excellent, indeed inseparable, friends. Alexei always waited impatiently when Father Grigori was coming, and often and often he eagerly begged his attendants to fetch Rasputin, so that he might tell him his lovely stories and fairy tales, sometimes merry, sometimes sad. On one of the first visits Alexei had rushed up to him beaming with joy, and then hurried into his father's study, crying: "Papa, papa, the new man has come again!"

This led to Rasputin's being generally referred to in the imperial family as "the new man," "novykh"; a little later the Tsar conferred the name of "Novykh" on him in an autograph letter.

On later occasions, when Rasputin came to the Palace by the dark back stairs, he first kissed the Tsar and Tsaritsa, and then they all sat down comfortably to listen to Grigori's tales of the life of the Siberian peasants and his own pilgrimages. On these evenings the Tsesarevich was allowed to stay up longer, and to sit on Rasputin's knee in his trailing pale blue silk dressing-gown.

"Rasputin succeeded in winning the love and trust of the imperial couple," said a high Court official once. "He was able to stimulate, encourage, cheer, rouse, comfort, and edify them. He often reduced them to tears, for he never minced matters and sometimes treated them very severely; but afterwards he told them merry jokes and droll stories, so that soon they could no longer be without his company."

The elder daughters of the Emperor, in particular, had always something secret to discuss with Grigori Efimovich whenever he came to the Palace. He became their most confidential adviser, and they initiated him into all their private affairs, of which, like other young girls, they had plenty. If one or the other of them liked an officer, they at once confided in the good Grigori and, even when he was away, they asked him for his "wise advice" in letters.

The Grand Duchess Olga, for example, who had fallen in love with an officer called Nikolai, wrote to Rasputin from Livadia:

"My dear precious friend,—It is very sad that it is so long since I have seen *you*. I am longing for *you* and often think of *you*. Where are *you* going to spend the Christmas holidays? Please write to me. I am always so happy when I get a letter from *you*.

"Do *you* remember what *you* said to me about that Nikolai? Ah, if *you* knew how difficult it is for me to follow *your* advice. Please forgive my weakness, my good friend. God grant that Mama will be better this winter, or I shall be very sad.

"I am very glad to be able to see Father Feofan from time to time. Not long ago I met him in the new Cathedral at Yalta. Our little private chapel is very pretty. *Au revoir,* my dear, precious friend, it is time for me to go to tea. Pray for *your* true and loving

"Olga."

Anastasia, the second daughter, also wrote several letters to Grigori Efimovich.

"My dear, precious, only friend," one of them begins. "How much I should like to see *you* again. *You* appeared to me to-day in a dream. I am always asking Mama when *you* will come, and I am happy even to be able to send *you* my greetings. I send *you* my warmest wishes for the New Year, and hope it will bring *you* health and happiness. I think of *you* always, my dear, because *you* are so good to me. I have not seen *you* for such a long time, but no evening passes without my thinking of *you*. I wish *you* the best of everything. Mama has promised that when *you* are here again, I shall see *you* at Ania's. This thought already brings happiness to

"*Your* Anastasia."

But naturally it was the little Tsesarevich who was most attached to his friend; the enigmatic personality of the Siberian peasant filled the boy's imagination. Soon, in cases of slight illness, if Rasputin merely spoke to Alexei on the telephone it was enough to cheer him up immediately and put him in a good humour. If he complained of a headache, say, one of his sisters

rang up Rasputin, and then gave her brother the receiver. One of Rasputin's women friends describes one such telephone conversation which she overheard. She was visiting him when the telephone bell rang, Tsarskoe Selo speaking. Rasputin rose and went to the instrument.

"What's this?" he cried. "Alesha is not yet asleep? He has earache? Bring him to the telephone."

He made a sign to those present to keep quiet, and then spoke into the telephone:

"Now then, Aleshinka, what's the matter, why are *you* not asleep? *You* have pains? That is not true, there's nothing the matter with *you*. Go to bed at once and sleep. *Your* ear does not hurt *you* any longer, I tell *you*, it does not hurt *you* any more. Do *you* hear? Go to sleep."

A quarter of an hour later the Palace again rang up to say that the earache of the heir-apparent had stopped, and that he had already fallen asleep.

The whole imperial family loved and idolized Grigori Efimovich. Both parents and children soon called him "Little Father Grigori," "friend," and "starets." He was often present at the masses said by the Court chaplain, Father Vassiliev, in the crypt of the Fedorovski Sobor. The Tsaritsa and her children stood with the peasant Grigori before the ikonostas to receive the sacrament and exchange the kiss of peace; Rasputin kissed the Empress on the forehead, while she kissed his hand.

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The diaries of the Emperor contain brief references to Rasputin's first visits to Tsarskoe Selo. They begin with the words: "I have made the acquaintance of a man of God, Grigori by name, from the Tobolsk government."

A little later he notes: "This evening we were in the Sergeevska and saw Grigori." A few months after this he again writes in the diary: "Grigori arrived at a quarter to seven; he brought a picture of Saint Simeon of Verkhoture, greeted the children, and talked with us until a quarter to eight." The note ends with the remark, "Militsa and Stana dined with us; we talked of Grigori the whole evening."

The visits of the starets to Tsarskoe Selo were not, however,

allowed to continue undisturbed for long. Thanks to the secret espionage service the whole Court was soon aware of the appearance of the new miracle-worker, although he did come by the back stairs. For the agents of General Spiridovich had also kept their eyes on the back doors of the Palace, and had given their chief exact details of every one of Rasputin's visits. In a short time all the Court officials were in revolt against "this muzhik" who had had the audacity to "force his way into the imperial family," and all sorts of more or less dangerous intrigues against Grigori Efimovich were at once set on foot.

It must be confessed that Rasputin's behaviour was calculated to rouse disgust and indignation among the courtiers: not even in the Imperial Palace did he make the slightest change in his peasant ways; when anything displeased him he unceremoniously banged with his fists on the table, and generally behaved in the Tsar's presence as with an equal.

The first openly to attack Rasputin was the governess of the Tsar's daughters. The starets had got into the habit, on his evening visits, of going to the rooms of the young grand duchesses, who were generally in bed at that hour, to give them his blessing. Miss Tiucheva was scandalized by Grigori's visits, and succeeded in persuading the Emperor to forbid Rasputin to enter the girls' rooms.

M. Gilliard, too, the tutor of the heir-apparent, was not particularly impressed by his pupil's new friend, and tried in vain, when in the company of the Emperor and Empress, to bring the conversation round to Rasputin, so that he might express his disapproval. It seemed, however, as if there were a conspiracy between Nikolai, Alexandra, and the children, never to mention Rasputin before Gilliard; nay, the Empress had expressly forbidden the children to discuss Grigori Efimovich with the tutor. She had a feeling that this "pedantic Swiss" would never understand the true value and holiness of Rasputin, and she was obviously avoiding all painful discussion.

Meanwhile, a flood of gossip and scandal poured forth from the ladies of the Court, old and young: it was said that Rasputin, shortly after his first appearance at Tsarskoe Selo, had seduced and even raped the children's nurse, Vishniakova; she had com-

plained to the Empress, but had been met with unbelief and been reproved in the bargain.

Soon there was a rumour that the Empress was making shirts for Rasputin with her own hands—for a good-for-nothing, dissolute peasant, who had had a very bad reputation in his home district on account of his vicious life! His very name was a proof of this, for "Rasputin" meant nothing but "the dirty one," "debauchee," or "ravisher of girls." This last assertion was reported to the Empress, who resolved to investigate the matter. She despatched a trustworthy person to Pokrovskoe to institute inquiries about Grigori Efimovich. There it was proved that the name Rasputin had nothing whatever to do with Grigori's way of life: the village of Pokrovskoe had originally been called "Podkino Rasputie," for which reason various families there had for centuries borne the name of Rasputin.

Fresh slanders and suspicions were called forth by the rapidly growing friendship between the starets and the Tibetan quack-doctor, Badmaev; they were frequently seen together, and the rumour went round that Rasputin treated the sick Tsesarevich with powders from Badmaev's laboratory. Some courtiers even said that they knew that Badmaev kept Rasputin informed of every improvement in the boy's condition, so that Grigori could hasten to Tsarskoe Selo, say his prayers, and in this way make it appear that he had brought the recovery about by a miracle.

The old and tactful Count Fredericks, as was his way in difficult situations, thought it best to know nothing at all of this affair which was causing such lively excitement in the Palace. When asked his opinion of Rasputin, he replied with a courteous smile that he had never even heard of a man of the name.

Of the aides-de-camp, only Admiral Nilov, the not always discreet "Court buffoon," openly attacked Rasputin, whose bluntness so far surpassed his own. However, when this led to an indignant reproof from the Emperor, he immediately retired and made friends with Grigori Efimovich with all speed. At a later period he tried once more to go over to the opposite side, this time also with no great success. The rest of the aides-de-camp did not dare to criticize the new saint; they all, Zablin, Loman, Prince Putianin, Maltsev, and the rest of them, though

furious at the growing power of Rasputin, outwardly attempted to establish cordial and friendly relations. In this Captains Loman and Maltsev were most successful; they, in time, became the regular "postillions" between the Tsaritsa and her "friend."

Grigori's appearance at Court roused the greatest interest in the different political salons, and all the speculators, intriguers, place-hunters, and spies who frequented these circles developed a feverish activity. The Master of the Horse, Burdukov, with his unerring eye, was one of the first to recognize the importance of the change in the state of affairs at Tsarskoe Selo: it was no longer sufficient to gain the Emperor's ear through the intermediary of grooms-of-the-chamber and aides-de-camp; it would in future be far more important to be in the good graces of the all-powerful "little father" who was a "tsar above the Tsars."

How these men rejoiced to discover that this "tsar above the Tsars" took bribes, pocketed commissions, drank Madeira, and loved the society of beautiful women; that he liked to embrace society ladies, courtesans, and servant girls, and loved to stroke their bosoms! Burdukov's guests quickly contrived to exploit the "saint's" human weaknesses for their own purposes; the Baroness Rosen and her friend, the beautiful Princess Dolgorukaia, were particularly skilful at this game. Their salon was frequented by many women who could satisfy the most fastidious tastes and, besides, the "engineer" provided excellent wines. The result was that the Baroness's house became Grigori's favourite resort, where, over many a glass of Madeira, he would gossip with countesses and courtesans about what was happening at Court.

And, lastly, the success of the starets caused a veritable paroxysm of enthusiasm in the salon of Countess Ignatiev. Was it not there that Grigori Efimovich had first been recognized and appreciated? Had they not from the start believed in his sanctity? His acceptance at Tsarskoe Selo was thus a blazing personal triumph for the Ignatiev circle. These reactionary politicians who, even earlier, had found Rasputin's words shrewd, now designated his utterances as sublime and divine; women who had liked him before fell madly in love with him. Luncheon parties were arranged even more frequently, at which they talked of the

new miracles and splendid utterances of the starets, and strengthened each other's convictions that he was a newly risen saviour. With voluptuous rapture they abandoned themselves to the unusual experience of being visited by a real redeemer, drinking tea with him, and discussing the deepest things in Heaven and earth with him over a cigarette. This was reserved for St. Petersburg society alone; where else in the whole world would such a sensation have been possible?

Meanwhile, Rasputin's visits to the Imperial Palace had practically ceased; the Tsar, influenced by the growing scandal, finally thought it advisable that his and the Empress's meetings with Grigori Efimovich should be transferred to neutral ground; this was found when Ania Vyrubova moved into her cottage close to the Alexander Palace. Like her imperial friends, Anna had been convinced of the holiness of the starets the first time she met him, at the palace of the Grand Duchess Militsa. Her simple soul firmly believed that Grigori was an emissary of God, commissioned by Heaven to watch over the well-being of the royal house, and protect the Tsar and his son from all adversity. So she joyfully undertook the rôle of hostess, and arranged regular meetings at her house between Alexandra and Grigori Efimovich.

1909? late?

The Empress soon expressed a wish to know Rasputin's family, and bring them into touch with her own children. Matriona Rasputin, the eldest daughter of the starets, gives a charming and vivid picture of their first meeting at Ania's house:

"We drove to Tsarskoe Selo in one of the Court carriages; I still remember my feverish trembling when I entered Madame Vyrubova's house. The Tsaritsa had not yet arrived, so we sat down to wait on a soft sofa. The living-room was comfortably furnished; there were brackets everywhere with innumerable knick-knacks and engravings and photographs on the walls.

"Suddenly the door bell rang and, soon after, we heard the rustling of ladies' dresses. Berchik, Madame Vyrubova's favourite manservant, opened the door and the Tsaritsa came in, followed by her daughters. She greeted us with a kindly smile; we kissed her hand respectfully; and she sat down and asked us to do the same.

"The Grand Duchesses clustered round Varia and me, and vied with each other in asking us questions:

" 'How old are you? What do you do? How do you like school?' they asked, and they spoke so quickly that my sister and I found it no easy matter to satisfy their curiosity.

"The Tsaritsa talked to my mother, and now and again glanced at me with her beautiful, infinitely sad eyes. I had a vague feeling that I must speak to her and, finally, taking my courage in both hands, I said: 'Mama' (we called the Tsaritsa Mama because we looked on her as the mother of all Russia), 'tell me, have you many servants'?

"The Tsaritsa replied laughingly: 'I have, my love!' "

Such meetings between the imperial family and Rasputin's were frequently repeated, and a regular friendship developed between the children.

In the meantime, however, Grigori Efimovich had some dangerous opponents to contend with—all the clairvoyants and miracle-workers who had previously been influential at Court and now saw their position threatened. Dr. Badmaev, the cleverest of them all, had immediately gone over to Rasputin's side, and formed a direct alliance with him: John of Kronstadt, too, for good or ill, had to stick to the starets, since he had been the first in St. Petersburg to recognize him as a holy man. However much he might have liked to do so, it would not have looked well for him, John the "seer," to confess that he had made a mistake, and that Grigori Efimovich was an impostor.

The lesser miracle-workers of the "iurodivye" class, however, were furious at the rise of Rasputin. Mitia Koliaba fell from one epileptic fit into another, screamed and howled, and waved his stumps angrily in the air and, in his language, which only the psalm-singer Egorov understood, called down all imaginable evils on the usurper. The half-crazy epileptic, Daria Ossipova, on the other hand, at once took a passionate interest in Rasputin, and persecuted him with shrieking declarations of love whenever she could get hold of him.

* * * * *

It was some years before Rasputin's power made itself felt outside the imperial family; at first the starets had been careful

not to exercise his by no means assured influence on the sovereign in any way that might excite remark. But, little by little, he began to interfere increasingly in State affairs, more particularly, however, in Church policy.

When the see of Tobolsk became vacant in 1911, Grigori succeeded in persuading the Tsar, regardless of the protests of the Synod, into appointing the simple and entirely uneducated monk Varnava as bishop of Tobolsk. Before he became a monk Varnava had been a mere gardener's boy in a monastery. Rasputin had been friendly with him in earlier days, and he took advantage of this opportunity to infuriate the learned and arrogant prelates by elevating the gardener's boy to a bishopric. For Grigori Efimovich, the simple and unlettered peasant, had never had any use for scholastic theology and its representatives; and it gave him enormous pleasure to be able to humiliate the Synod and all the princes of the Church by this coup.

Naturally, by acting in this way, he embroiled himself with the higher clergy and, at the same time, he also sacrificed the friendship of the "true Russian people" by setting himself sharply against their political aims. He declared at every opportunity that the sovereign must be honoured and loved by the lowest classes of the population, and that his power chiefly depended on these classes.

It is true that the "true Russian people" had themselves preached a similar doctrine when they admitted Rasputin to their membership; but, while the phrase about the "God-fearing people" was to them a mere phrase, Rasputin, a real peasant, took the idea quite seriously, a fact that was bound to bring him into definite opposition to his former supporters. When, on one occasion, someone said at a meeting of the "true Russian people" that the simple folk were an unreliable element in politics, and could easily be roused to rebellion, Rasputin burst out in a rage: "If that is true," he cried, "then the fault lies solely with those who cunningly keep the people in ignorance. Just think of the state of things in the country. There are neither hospitals nor schools, but instead public-houses innumerable! There we peasants are poisoned with spirits. You should sweep your own doorsteps rather than blame the simple people and the Jews.

You see very clearly the mote in your brother's eye; but you are blind to the beam in your own."

In consequence of such speeches and others like them, the reactionary clique, which had formerly given Rasputin their full support, withdrew it, and tried to overthrow him. So great was the influence of this group that Rasputin's position became very insecure. He felt this clearly and decided on an impressive step which, he thought, would forestall further hostilities. He reached for his wanderer's staff and set out on a pilgrimage to the holy places of Eastern Christendom, to Kiev, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. He proclaimed that he was undertaking this journey because evil men had sullied his purity, and he himself felt that he had not opposed the temptations of Satan with sufficient strength; to atone for this weakness he now designed to start on a great pilgrimage of penitence.

This decision raised him higher than ever in the esteem of the Emperor, and even more in that of the Empress; and, when he really started, Alexandra regarded it as a special proof of his pure and pious character. She was here experiencing exactly the same feeling as the simple peasants of Pokrovskoe had. The saint might get drunk and sin with all sorts of girls and women; but the explanation could always be found, if you only considered how the pious man, more than all others, was exposed to the wiles of the devil. When Rasputin, after a period of dissolute living, resumed his self-mortification, this seemed to confirm the assumption, and the peasants, like the Empress, said: "The holy man has won a great victory in the fight with the devil."

When grave rumours about Rasputin's private life first began to be heard at Court, and incontestable proofs of his debaucheries were laid before the Tsaritsa, it proved impossible to shake her firm conviction of the holiness of her "friend." When she was told that Grigori had kissed this or that woman, she would refer to the brotherly kisses of the first apostles; and the many reports about carousals and orgies were in her eyes either "calumniation of the holy man" or "temptations of the devil," from which Grigori would certainly emerge victorious. By his pilgrimage of penitence Rasputin proved in the clearest possible way that he had really succeeded in "escaping from the claws of Satan"; and,

after his return from the Holy Land, he was welcomed by the Tsaritsa with the greatest love and reverence.

But soon a new danger threatened the starets. The Prime Minister, Kokovtsov, began to see a serious menace in Grigori's increasing power. Stolypin, his predecessor, had sometimes been annoyed about this "dissolute peasant," but had let the matter rest because he observed that the monarch did not receive his suggestions in a friendly spirit. But Kokovtsov had, from the first, taken a violent antipathy to Rasputin, and made up his mind to remove him from the capital at the earliest possible opportunity. As ex-Minister of Finance, he first tried bribery and offered the starets two hundred thousand roubles on condition that he would immediately retire for good to Pokrovskoe. To his utter amazement Rasputin flatly rejected this proposal, declaring that he was ready to disappear if "papa" himself so desired, but that he was not to be bought. Further exasperated by this reproof, the Prime Minister next addressed himself direct to the Tsar, and tried to explain to him that Rasputin was a common swindler against whom public opinion was already universally in revolt.

But the Tsar interrupted Kokovtsov with a contemptuous wave of his hand and asked with a smile: "So you attach importance to what the newspapers say."

"Yes, your Majesty," answered the Prime Minister; "I pay attention to the newspapers, especially when they vilify the person of the Emperor. But, in the present case, even the most loyal journals contain harsh criticisms."

The Tsar looked bored. "These critics are idiots," he said. "I know Rasputin."

Kokovtsov was at his wits' end; but he was bold enough once more to implore the Emperor, in the name of the dynasty, to permit Rasputin's dismissal from the capital. In the end the Emperor coldly declared: "I will tell him myself to go away and never come back."

The Tsar really asked Rasputin in the most considerate way to leave the capital for a time. Grigori Efimovich needed no persuasion, and made preparations for immediate departure. On bidding them good-bye he said to Nikolai and Alexandra: "I

know that evil men are trying to rob me of your love. Do not listen to them. If you part from me you will lose your son and your crown in six months."

The Empress burst into tears and cried: "How can we part from *you*? Are *you* not our only protector, our best friend?"

With these words she fell on her knees and begged for his blessing.

* * * * *

It was autumn; the imperial family had, as often before, again gone to Poland, to Skiernevice, in the "Belovechkaia Pushcha," where the Emperor was in the habit of hunting the aurochs. At that time many of these rare animals were still to be found in the dense forests of that region.

In these lonely parts one day a fresh accident happened. The Tsesarevich had gone out in a boat on the marshes and, on his return, had leapt ashore too venturesomely; he slipped, struck his knee against a stone, and immediately started a severe internal hemorrhage. This became much worse when the Tsaritsa, after a temporary improvement, took him out for a drive. The jolting of the carriage caused the child the most terrible agony and, when they drew up at the door of the hunting lodge, Alexei had to be carried to his room more dead than alive.

The doctors diagnosed a swelling in the groin; one foot also swelled, and the invalid's temperature rose alarmingly. Alexei moaned and groaned continuously, and fought against an examination, as any touch on the injured parts caused him intolerable pain.

Symptoms of blood-poisoning appeared, and there was the greatest danger of fatal complications.

Intercessory services were already being held all day long over all Russia, and the parents scarcely dared to leave the sick-room. As the Empress was trying once again to soothe the moaning child she mentioned Grigori's name. The boy opened his eyes at once, looked at his mother, and passionately begged her to send for the "little father." Later in the evening, when the danger had further increased, the Empress secretly, without the knowledge of the doctors and the courtiers, made her friend Ania telegraph to Rasputin at Pokrovskoe, begging him to pray for the sick

child. The same night brought that remarkable reply which seems to have made a profound impression on the Empress. Next morning the whole Court was anxiously assembled in the drawing-room to make inquiries about the Tsesarevich's health when Alexandra appeared with a strange, peaceful smile on her lips and said that, though the doctors had noticed no improvement, she herself was no longer at all anxious, because she had received a telegram from Father Grigori. This she produced and read aloud to the company. It ran: "God has lent an ear to *your* tears and prayers. Do not despond. *Your* son will live. The doctors must not worry him any more."

The Empress hastened to the sick-room and showed the telegram to her son. On hearing that Grigori had promised that he would recover, he showed obvious pleasure and became visibly calmer. A few hours later the fever abated and the little patient said he no longer felt any pain.

The doctors examined him again and observed that the swelling in the groin had gone down and that the crisis could be regarded as past. They declared that such a case was not uncommon, and that nature herself sometimes helped in situations before which medical art was powerless. But Alexandra, as she sat peacefully with her husband and Ania that evening, for the first time for a long while, maintained that Alexei's marvellous recovery was of course entirely due to Rasputin's intercession.

A few days later the heir-apparent was able to be moved to Tsarskoe Selo, and the Empress contrived that Rasputin should be once more recalled to the Court. She declared that his presence in the capital was indispensable in view of the health of the heir-apparent, who might at any moment have another accident, and Grigori Efimovich was the only person who could help him.

Several years passed, and it was during the War that another accident to Alexei led to Rasputin's being once more summoned as a saviour in time of need. After the Tsar had taken over the supreme command of the Russian forces he had often to stay at headquarters, first at Baranovichi and then at Mohilev. On one of these journeys he took the Tsesarevich, now a big boy, with him, although Rasputin had expressed strong disapproval of the plan from the beginning.

1915 or '16

The royal train had hardly started when the boy, who had pressed his face against the carriage window, was suddenly attacked by a violent bleeding from the nose. The Court physician in attendance, Dr. Derevenko, tried all available remedies to stop the bleeding, without success. Orders had meantime been given for the train to turn back; but on arrival at Tsarskoe Selo the patient was already very weak.

The Empress, immediately she heard the news, sent Vyrubova to Rasputin and, soon after, he appeared in the Palace. He made the sign of the cross over the invalid, prayed for a while before the ikons, and then declared: "Give thanks to God. He has once more granted me *your* son's life."

The little Tsesarevich had become visibly easier as soon as Rasputin had appeared at his bedside; a few hours later there was a marked improvement in his condition, the fever abated, and the bleeding, which had been gradually diminishing, stopped altogether. Rasputin returned from Tsarskoe Selo in very good spirits, and told all his friends that, in future, the Tsar would think twice before disregarding his advice.

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Since their accession to the throne all the decisions taken by the imperial couple had been strongly influenced by their anxiety about the heir; and, therefore, the influence of the man who had more than once been successful in saving the invalid in moments of despair naturally knew no limits. Whatever explanation the Court might have for Rasputin's marvellous cures, whether it was that his soothing presence alone had sufficed to aid in overcoming the crisis, or whether it was due merely to a fortuitous combination of circumstances, in any case the Empress was entirely convinced that God himself had performed a miracle on her son through the mediation of the holy man, Grigori Efimovich.

Just as earlier magicians had also contrived to acquire an influence on the conduct of politics, so it was not surprising that Rasputin's power at the Imperial Court soon ceased to be confined to private and religious matters, and that the Empress endeavoured to enlist the wisdom of this man, whom God had sent, in the interest of affairs of State. For she never for a mo-

ment lost faith in Grigori's divine inspiration, and was certain that the Almighty, in fulfilment of Philippe's prophecies, had sent him to them as their true counsellor and "friend."

Nor must those ideas be forgotten that at one time had moved the "Union of the True Russian People" to exploit Rasputin's personality for political purposes. The Tsaritsa also believed that Russia and the dynasty could be saved only by a really popular movement, and that the appearance of the simple peasant, Grigori Efimovich, was somehow mysteriously linked up with this.

The more markedly Rasputin's behaviour—his frank, unpolished manners, his blunt and often wounding speech—differed from the strict etiquette of the courtiers, the stronger became the belief of the Empress, who was sometimes afraid of her isolation in the "idyll," that in him she was dealing with a genuine representative of the people; she felt that, unlike all the other people who surrounded the Emperor and herself, the man was not seeking to hide the truth under smooth, polite formulas, but openly and sincerely expressed what he thought and felt. In her eyes Grigori Efimovich was sent by Heaven to make the voice of the Russian people heard above the cowardice of the Court flunkeys.

The Emperor himself was at first more prudent than his wife, and his attitude of reserve towards Rasputin did not melt immediately. The Empress was greatly troubled over this, and made it her most sacred duty to use all her influence to overcome her husband's distrust. She implored him to listen to the counsels of their "Friend," which came from God Himself, and endeavoured by all the means in her power to convince him that Rasputin, more than any other person, truly had his welfare at heart.

Later, during the War, when the Tsar was staying at headquarters, Alexandra never omitted to call attention in her letters to the holiness of Rasputin, and to beg Nikolai faithfully to follow their "Friend's" advice. On one occasion she wrote: *

* In these quotations from the Empress's letters, which were in English, and often very faulty English, the translators have followed the edition of the letters by Sir Bernard Pares, *Letters from the Tsaritsa to the Tsar*, 1914–16.

"In les *Amis de Dieu* one of the old men of God said that a country, where a man of God helps the Sovereign, will never be lost & its true—only one must listen, trust, and ask advice—not think He * does not know. God opens everything to Him, that is why people, who do not grasp His soul, so immensely admire His wonderful brain—ready to understand anything; & when He blesses an undertaking—it succeeds & if He advises people—one can be quiet that they are good—if they later on change that is already not His fault—but He will be less mistaken in people than we are—experience in life blessed by God."

Another time she tells her husband of a meeting with Grigori Efimovich:

"We dined yesterday at Ania's with our Friend. . . . He entreats you to be firm, to be the Master & not always to give in to *Trepov*—you know much better than that man (still let him lead you)—& why not our Friend who leads through God. Remember why I am disliked—shows it right to be firm & feared & you be the same, you a man—only believe more in our Friend (instead of Trepov). He lives for you & Russia. . . ."

"Believe our Friend's advice," says another letter. "Even the children notice how things don't come out well if we do not listen to Him & the contrary—good when listen. . . ." And again: "Lovy mine, be firm and trust our Friend's advice. . . . I wld not write all this, were I not so affraid for you and yr. gentle kindness always ready to give in, when not backed up by poor old wify, Ania, and our Friend—therefore the untrue and bad hate our influence which is but for the good. . . ." Just a little more patience & deepest faith in the prayers & help of our Friend —then all will go well. I am fully convinced that great and beautiful times are coming for your reign & Russia."

The Empress even believed that Rasputin was able to control the forces of nature. In the autumn of 1915, when thick fogs were interfering with the movements of the Russian army, she wrote to her husband at headquarters: "Our Friend is always praying and thinking of the War—He says we are to tell him at once if there is anything particular—so she did about the fogg,

1915

* The Tsaritsa always refers to Rasputin as He with a capital letter.

and He scolded for not having said it at once—says no more foggs will disturb."

And, in another letter, she again refers to the miraculous power of Rasputin's prayers: the ship "Vriag," in spite of a storm, had reached Glasgow from Gibraltar. Both vessel and crew were unharmed because Rasputin, in Tobolsk, prayed for them.

This infinite faith in the divine powers of the "Friend" also explains the importance Alexandra attached to certain small objects which had been blessed by him. She once, in a letter to headquarters, exhorted the Tsar without fail to pass the comb Rasputin gave him through his hair before an important council of ministers. She then repeated the advice by telegram: "I shall go to Church and place a candle before the ikon of the Mother of God, in order that God may support you. Do not forget Rasputin's comb."

The Emperor who, to begin with, had resisted the magic of this Siberian peasant, was bound, under the influence of his beloved Alix, gradually to fall more and more under his spell, especially as from his early youth he had been strongly inclined to mysticism and belief in heaven-sent "mediators." Thus, in the course of time, he, like his wife, became a convinced adherent of the starets. During a walk he once made the following confession to one of his aides-de-camp: "Whenever I am oppressed by any care, doubt, or worry, it is enough to talk five minutes with Grigori; I at once feel strong and calm again. He always says exactly what I need to hear, and the effect of his good words lasts for weeks. . . ."

Sometimes, it is true, his dependence on the "Friend" landed the Tsar in very awkward situations, especially when it was a question of carrying out Rasputin's wishes with regard to petitioners. Grigori soon acquired the habit of simply sending all the people who came to him with petitions direct to Tsarskoe Selo, with a letter of recommendation. In spite of his esteem for the starets, it was somewhat difficult for the Tsar to sanction without consideration all these requests from persons of the most varied ranks and classes.

In course of time the Tsar managed to persuade Grigori not

to send petitioners direct to him, except in very rare cases; but this still occurred occasionally, and involved the Emperor in many a painful dilemma, especially when Rasputin had brought his influence to bear on the Empress in favour of his protégé.

The Tsar's great esteem and reverence for Rasputin, the "saviour" of his son, is most clearly expressed in a statement made by Grigori himself to the monk-priest Iliodor: "Papa once took me by the shoulders, looked hard at me, and cried: 'Grigori, *you* are a Christ, *you* are a true Christ.' I smiled and he repeated once more: 'Yes, *you* are a Christ.' Another time, as we were sitting at table, Papa said: 'Grigori, *you* know how I love you! Please come to us every day, but do not use your influence on behalf of other people. It really distresses me not to be able to grant some of *your* requests.'"

An episode that took place at lunch at Tsarskoe Selo is also significant. The heir-apparent suddenly asked his father: "Papa, is Grigori Efimovich a saint?" The Emperor turned to the Court Chaplain, Father Vassiliev, who was present, and asked him to answer the Tsesarevich. The priest was in an awkward fix and gave an evasive reply which, on the whole, answered Alexei's question in the negative. The Emperor rose at once and broke off the conversation abruptly.

Rasputin's political views and his methods of putting them into practice were in complete harmony with his peasant character and, in this sense, he really did represent popular opinion at Court. He always remained entirely a simple muzhik, felt with his fellow-muzhiks, and understood the wishes and ideas of the common people.

This was shown clearly whenever a decision had to be made between war and peace: Grigori Efimovich hated war, as the common people hate it, because he, like them, knew that it is the lowest class that has to bear the main burden and sacrifice of war. In the year 1912, when the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, largely under the influence of his Montenegrin wife, was doing his utmost to induce the Tsar to intervene in the Balkan conflict, it was Rasputin who earnestly implored the sovereign to abstain from this adventure.

"Think what will become of *you* and *your* people," he appealed

to the Emperor. "*Your* grandfather helped Bulgaria to shake off the Turkish yoke, and how did they repay their saviour, little Mother Russia? Will our fathers, who shed their blood for these treacherous Tatars, bless their sons, if *you* send them on this campaign? Suppose we are victorious! What then? They say we must help our Slav brothers. But was not Cain the brother of Abel?"

This speech made a strong impression on the Emperor, and was not the least of the reasons for his decision not to participate in the Balkan War.

When the World War was imminent in 1914 it was again Rasputin who put the views of the muzhiks forcefully before the Emperor. But this time, unfortunately, the starets was unable to bring direct personal influence to bear, since he was lying in hospital at Tiumen, having received a severe knife wound from a woman.

Nevertheless, as soon as he heard that war was once again threatening, he sent an urgent telegram to the Emperor, exhorting him to preserve peace at any price, since it was absurd, for the sake of the susceptibilities of Serbia, to unloose a world struggle, the consequences of which were incalculable. In after years Grigori maintained, at every opportunity, that he would have been able to stop the war if he had not been lying on a sickbed at the time.

Right up to his death, Rasputin never ceased from emphasizing his profound aversion for war and the necessity of concluding peace with all speed. Paléologue gives an account of a very remarkable conversation about the war which he once had with the starets.

"In short, jerky sentences," says the Ambassador, "Rasputin drew a pathetic picture of the sufferings the war was inflicting on the Russian people:

" 'We have too many dead, too many wounded, too many ruins, too many tears! Think of the unhappy men who will never return, and remember that every one of them leaves five, six, or even ten behind to mourn him. I know villages, big villages, where all the inhabitants lament their dead. And the men who come back from the war, Lord God, what are they like? Cripples,

one-armed, blind! It is terrible! For more than twenty years grief will be our sole harvest from the Russian soil. . . . And you know, if the people suffer too much, things will be bad, they may be terrible! In many cases things have gone so far that there is talk of a Republic. You should tell all this to the Emperor.' "

And in the course of a conversation with Prince Yusupov, his future assassin, Grigori Efimovich said: "We have had enough of war and bloodshed! It is high time to put an end to this mischief! Why? Are not the Germans also our brothers? Christ said we should love our enemies; but what kind of love is this? Papa won't give in, and even Mama is pig-headed on the point; plainly some one or other is giving them bad advice again! The blame for the war rests with the Emperor. A whole lifetime of prayer will not suffice to atone for it. If it had not been that damned woman who ran a knife into me, I should have been on the spot and prevented it from ever coming to bloodshed. In my absence your accursed Sazonovs and the rest of them spoilt everything!"

To him, as to the mass of the people, the aims of Russian war policy were alien and incomprehensible; he knew that the muzhik took the field reluctantly and only because forced by compulsory military service. His clear-sightedness was so great that he once proclaimed, with the mien of a prophet, that the blood shed in this war would take a frightful revenge, not only on the generals and diplomats, but even on the Tsar himself.

"Russia," he cried, "entered on this war against the will of God. Woe to those who still refuse to see this. In order to hear the voice of God we have only to listen humbly; but the mighty are swollen with pride, think themselves very clever, and despise the simple-minded, until the day comes when the punishment of God descends on them like a flash of lightning!

"Christ is indignant at all the complaints that rise to him from the soil of Russia. The generals, of course, think nothing of driving a few thousand muzhiks, more or less, to their death; that does not stop them eating, drinking, and making money. Alas! the blood of the sacrifice will not only reach them, it will bespatter the Tsar too, since the Tsar is the father of the muz-

band on September 24th, 1916, "that Brussilov has not listened to your order to stop the advance. . . . Now He says again useless losses!"

Rasputin particularly loved to use his influence to remove slight injustices that caused ill-feeling among the people: "He begged me to tell you," wrote the Empress to her husband, "that it is not clear about the stamp money, the simple people cannot understand, we have enough coins & this may create disagreeablenesses. . . . I send you two stamps (money) fr. our Friend to show you that already one of them is false. People are very discontented—such wee papers flie away, in the darkness they cheat the *cabmen* & its not a good thing—He entreats you to have it stopped at once. . . ."

"Gr. is rather disturbed about the 'meat' stories," reports Alexandra in another letter. "One of the ministers, he thought, ought to send for a few of the chief merchants and explain it to them that it is wrong at such a grave moment, during war to heighten the prizes & make them feel ashamed of themselves. . . ."

The sound common-sense with which Grigori Efimovich spoke against premature celebrations of victory is most refreshing: he was opposed to the Tsar's making a triumphal entry into the captured town of Lemberg, saying the end of the war would be time enough for this; as it happened, the Russians were driven out of Lemberg again a few months later, and the enemy once more advanced far into Russian territory.

The continual falling off in the food supplies of the country also caused him great anxiety. He again and again called for energetic measures against the food profiteers, and finally worked out a rationing scheme on undeniably reasonable principles:

"He would propose," runs one of the Empress's letters, "3 days no other trains should go except those with flour butter and sugar—its even more necessary than meat or amunition just now. He counts that with 40 old soldiers one could load in an hour a train, send one after the other, but not all to one place, but to *Petrograd*—Moscow—and stop some waggons at different places, and have them by degrees brought on—If passenger trains only very few would be allowed and instead of all 4

classes these days hang on waggons with flour or butter fr. Siberia. The lines are less filled there coming towards the west and discontentment will be intense, if the things don't move. People will scream and say it is impossible, frighten you, if it can be done and 'will hark' as He says—but its necessary and tho' a risk, essential."

But Rasputin gave the strongest proof of his influence when he succeeded in depriving of his command his former protector and afterwards deadly enemy, the commander-in-chief, Nikolai Nikolaevich. The Grand Duke, in whose house Grigori had at first been welcomed with open arms, soon recognized that this "repulsive muzhik" would endanger his position, and afterwards tried by all means in his power to turn the Emperor against Rasputin. His wife and her sister also abandoned the starets; but this merely led to a complete rupture of relations between the imperial couple and Rasputin's original discoverers. Rasputin was perfectly aware of all this, and began to hate the Grand Duke fanatically, especially after Nikolai Nikolaevich, at the beginning of the war, replied to a telegram in which Grigori had announced his arrival at the front with the words: "You come, and I will have you hanged." After this Grigori took every opportunity of inciting the Empress and the Emperor against the Grand Duke.

With the great defeats of the summer of 1915 the starets succeeded in implanting in the Empress the conviction that, at this critical juncture, the Tsar must himself assume the supreme command of the army. Although all the ministers expressed themselves against this plan, and although Nikolai himself long hesitated to humiliate his uncle by degrading him in this way, Grigori finally succeeded in having the Grand Duke removed from his post as generalissimo and transferred to the most remote theatre of war, the Caucasian front.

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For a long time the advice of the "Friend" had been asked in every important appointment. Soon no one could hope for a ministerial post unless he had previously submitted to an examination by Rasputin and passed creditably; and a minister who had incurred Grigori's displeasure seldom retained his

position for long. The one exception was Sazonov, who, although Grigori had long hated him, managed to maintain himself in office for several years in spite of this.

The method by which Rasputin, the "peasant chancellor," convinced himself of the eligibility of the various candidates for their posts was most curious. He never thought of making minute investigations into their political record, as all the Court officials and the Emperor himself were in the habit of doing; he did not ask how the person in question stood with the various members of the imperial house; for his primitive mind a look at the candidate sufficed. For example, when a new Chief of the Police was to be appointed, Rasputin sent for the person in question or visited him, looked him attentively in the eyes for a few minutes, and the examination was at an end.

The circumstance that a powerful and influential man was engaging in politics without troubling in the slightest about the ordinary principles of politics and diplomacy gave rise to a most peculiar state of affairs, unique in history. The most refined devices and intrigues of statesmanship were impotent before this muzhik, who made his decisions emotionally, not from subtle tactical and diplomatic considerations, but according to the mood of the moment.

Of course, in this way he raised to dignity and office a large number of corrupt and incompetent men; but it appears at least doubtful whether the Emperor, had his influence been removed, would have made a better choice. It is certain that the ministers whom Rasputin overthrew richly deserved their fate, and that he himself was the first to acknowledge an error and make amends for it.

It is also certain that his not infrequent interventions in the administration of justice were always to the advantage of the accused or condemned, and never to their disadvantage. There is not a single case on record in which Rasputin, unlike almost all Russians in positions of power, sent a personal enemy to prison or had him banished to Siberia, although he had abundant opportunity to do so. On the contrary, everyone who could convince him that he had suffered injustice at the hands of the law was sure of his help and support. When the old Minister

of War, Sukhomlinov, was impeached and imprisoned, merely because a scapegoat was required for the military reverses, Rasputin did his best to get his former enemy released. In this connection a letter from Alexandra to the Tsar is characteristic:

"Then our Friend said 'General Sukhomlinov should be set free, so that he should not die in jail, otherwise things will not be smooth. One should never fear to release prisoners, to restore sinners to a life of righteousness—prisoners until they reach jail become through their sufferings in the eyes of God—nobler than we'—more or less His words. Every, even vilest sinner, has moments where the soul rises and is purified through their fearful suffering—then the hand must be reached out to save them before they are relost by bitterness and despair."

For anyone who had once been his friend he was always ready to use his utmost influence, even with the Emperor. One day, when the Tsar had expressed his dissatisfaction with the Prime Minister, Stürmer, a protégé of Rasputin's, the latter immediately sent him the following stern and laconic telegram: "Hands off the old man, I tell *you*." But he also reprimanded his own favourites with equal sternness, when he had cause to be displeased with them. This same Stürmer, whom he had defended so resolutely against the Emperor, had soon after to listen to downright abuse from Rasputin's own mouth. The Prime Minister had dared to postpone the immediate execution of an order from the Empress, whereupon her Friend shouted to him, as if he were a little schoolboy: "*You* must not act against Mama's wishes, or I shall at once abandon *you* and then it will be all up with *you*. Behave accordingly then." Then, pointing to the discomfited Stürmer, he remarked contemptuously to his secretary, who came hurrying up: "He tried to defy me, but I will break his neck if he doesn't obey."

Towards ministers who did not owe their posts to his influence there was no limit to the overbearingness he might display. The first time he encountered the minister Maklakov he ignored him entirely at the outset; then haughtily beckoned him with his crooked forefinger, saying, "Come here, *you*!" Maklakov, in his amazement, actually moved a step or two in Rasputin's direction, whereupon the latter burst out: "Pay attention to what I

tell *you*. It will not be long before we make a good man of *you*, one pleasing to God. And now," he concluded, turning his back on the minister, "now, *you* can go."

Most remarkable, too, was the incident of Rasputin's expedition to "examine the soul" of a prospective minister. It occurred just before Stolypin's assassination, when the "true Russian people" were intending to make Alexander Nikolaevich Khvostov, the Governor of Nizhni-Novgorod, Minister of the Interior. A great Court hunt took place at this time, and every member of the "True Russian Union" who took part in it, used the opportunity to present Khvostov's personality to the Emperor in the most favorable light. The Emperor finally began to busy himself seriously over Khvostov's appointment, but decided first to entrust the "Friend" with the mission of obtaining further particulars about the candidate.

Rasputin at once proceeded to Nizhni-Novgorod and appeared one day in the office of the unsuspecting Governor.

"Here I am," he said simply. "Papa has sent me to examine *your* soul, as we are thinking of making *you* Minister of the Interior perhaps."

At these words from the peasant standing before him in his clumsy boots and dirty sheepskin, fat Khvostov, all-powerful Governor of Nizhni-Novgorod, burst into peals of laughter. He never thought of taking this muzhik's speech seriously, and treated the whole thing as a mad joke. Grigori Efimovich was much offended at being met with such contempt, and, turning away without a word, he seized his knotted stick and left the palace. But at midday, immediately before he left the town, he turned up again, opened Khvostov's door for one instant, and called out in a threatening and malicious tone: "I have dealt with *you* all right. I've wired a report about *you* to Tsarskoe Selo."

At first the Governor again laughed heartily; but soon a faint apprehension crept over him that there might be some reason for taking his visitor's strange speeches seriously. He sent for the postmaster and ordered him to produce Grigori Efimovich's telegram. Imagine his feelings an hour later when he had the text of this telegram in his hands.

"Anna Vyrubova, Tsarskoe Selo," it ran: "Tell Mama that the grace of the Lord is in Khvostov, but that for the time being there is still something lacking."

The Governor's fat face turned yellow, and his eyes like round marbles rolled with horror. What the peasant had said was true, then, and he might have been a minister! A few days later Khvostov hurried to St. Petersburg with a bundle of documents, and asked for an audience with the Tsar, on "urgent administrative business." He was received, but at once noticed that the Emperor's mood was anything but gracious. He was dismissed as soon as he had explained his quite insignificant business.

After this Khvostov made every effort to meet Grigori Efimovich as often as possible, and on these occasions he treated the starets with exquisite courtesy and devotion; he would have kissed his hand in public. But some years had to pass before he had a chance of becoming intimate with Rasputin. It was at a drinking party. On meeting the Tsar soon after this Rasputin said that he had had an opportunity of examining Khvostov's soul afresh, and found that it had improved. A few days later the fat Governor at last became Minister of the Interior.

The Prime Minister, Boris Stürmer, the successor of the aged Goremykin, also owed his appointment to the patronage of the "Friend." "This old chap," declared Grigori, when Stürmer was mentioned to him as a possible candidate, "has wanted to be a minister for a long time. When I was still staying on the English Prospekt, he and his wife visited me, and asked me to make him a minister. Well, to be sure, he is quite a good creature, and things will be fixed up."

Whereupon the starets met Boris Stürmer at the flat of a little actress, "examined his soul," and, on this examination's proving satisfactory, recommended his appointment to the Emperor. It was made immediately.

Stürmer's period of office marked the zenith of Rasputin's political influence. The new Prime Minister obeyed every one of his orders unconditionally. Stürmer met the "peasant Chancellor" secretly at least once a week to receive his instructions. The setting of these meetings must have been most romantic, for they

took place at night in the Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul, to which Rasputin had the entry through one of his disciples, the daughter of Nikitin, the Governor of the Fortress. The beautiful Lydia Nikitina was an ardent admirer of the starets, and she called for him at his flat in the evening, and drove him to the Fortress. In her white maidenly room secret councils lasting till daybreak took place between Rasputin and Stürmer, at which all important orders, enactments, and appointments were exhaustively discussed.

It was not long before Stürmer disappointed expectations; he proved to be extraordinarily ambitious and vain, while his abilities left much to be desired. His every thought and wish were set on being president of the coming great peace conference, and in fancy he already saw his name in the history books of future generations alongside those of Nesselrode, Metternich, and Bismarck. But his capacities were out of all proportion to his lofty ambitions, with the result that the Emperor and his "Friend" soon became disappointed with him and removed him from office.

In the meantime Grigori Efimovich had taken a particular fancy to Protopopov, the Vice-President of the Duma, whose acquaintance he had made in his friend Badmaev's "sanatorium." Protopopov was a likable man of attractive social manners; but he was in an advanced stage of general paralysis. On account of this disease he alternated between states of excessive excitement and complete apathy. Occasionally he could fascinate everyone about him with his dazzling wit and brilliant *mots*, while at other times he was unfit for the most elementary mental work. For many years he had been a regular patient at the institute of the Tibetan, who had long ago marked him out for a high position in the State.

Grigori Efimovich met Protopopov in one of his good moments, and at once made up his mind that this charming and clever man must take over the Ministry of the Interior. The Tsar at first refused to make the appointment, because Protopopov belonged to the left wing of the Duma, and the most persistent effort on the part of Rasputin and the Tsaritsa was necessary to make Nikolai abandon his opposition and appoint Protopopov.

Even at the last moment an argument arose, and Rasputin had

to go to Tsarskoe Selo in person in order to put things right for his protégé. He returned to St. Petersburg in triumph, and the account he gave of the affair in the salon of his admirer, Madame Golovina, shows better than anything else the curious relations that existed between the imperial couple and their "Friend" who, in their eyes, was no longer merely the saviour of the sick heir-apparent, but also an indispensable, confidential adviser in the most momentous affairs of State.

"I have put everything in trim again," cried Rasputin with a smile of satisfaction, dropping into a chair. "I had only to go myself. The first person I ran into at the Palace was Ania. She could only groan and lament, that was all she could do. 'Things are all wrong,' cries she, 'he refuses to do it, only *you* can help, Grigori Efimovich.'

"Well, I went straight in. I saw at once that Mama was angry and defiant, while Papa was striding up and down the room whistling. But, after I had bullied them both a little, they soon saw reason! I had only to threaten that I would go back to Siberia and abandon them and their child to disaster, and they immediately gave in to me in everything. 'The man who turns his back on God,' said I, 'looks the devil in the face!' Somebody or other has been persuading them that this and that is wrong; what do they all know about it? Nothing at all. If they would only listen to me. I know that Protopopov is a good creature and believes in God. That is all that matters."

But that same evening he said to his secretary: "We were wrong about fat old Khvostov; he is a duffer, although a duffer of the Right! I tell you that all the men of the Right are blockheads. So we have now decided for the Left and made Protopopov a minister."

Then he looked proudly at his coarse, peasant fist, shook it vigorously, and cried: "Between these fingers I hold the Russian Empire!"