

CHAPTER VII

THE PENITENTIAL JOURNEY OF THE GREAT
SINNER

AS the Empress sat in her reception room of an afternoon, either alone or with her friend Ania, she would often take from the drawer of her escritoire the notes the "Friend" had made on his penitential pilgrimage to the holy places. They were jotted down on many crumpled sheets of paper, large and small, torn from a cheap notebook, in the big, clumsy peasant writing, every letter of which seemed to have been stuck on to the paper separately. The lines in their confused mass were some long, some short, some straight, and some sloping steeply; they looked as if one word had been piled on top of the other.

The slips themselves, too, were stained, covered with ink spots, creased, and eaten into by damp at the edges, for the pilgrim had preserved them in his dirty bread sack through all his wanderings, along with the innumerable trifles of his daily needs.

The Empress sat at her writing-table, and arranged these dirty slips with her delicate, carefully tended fingers. She pored over the confused characters, and read the papers again and again, until their meaning became clear and comprehensible to her. Then she made a fair copy of them in her album.

Here and there she corrected gross misspellings and altered unusual or awkward constructions, coarse words, and other clumsinesses; but for the most part she left the text exactly as the peasant had scribbled it down. For the oftener the Tsaritsa read Rasputin's words, the stronger became her feeling that she had never found anything more beautiful or more edifying than these "thoughts" of Grigori the pilgrim.

Never once had her imperial dignity given her such buoyant self-confidence as now. She was filled with the certainty that what she was doing was far loftier than anything she had ever

D.T.
on
the
pages
of

the
separate
evidence
for
Alex.

The roots of evil were in
these
scattered
notes,

accomplished in the discharge of her worldly duties as Empress of Russia. Grigori Efimovich, her God-sent "Friend," stood high above all earthly powers; he had jotted down these "thoughts" for the edification of his Empress; and it seemed to Alexandra that she was writing sentences originally dictated by God himself.

Could greater grace have been vouchsafed to any human being, even to the Empress of Russia herself, than the right to be the first to make a fair copy of the divinely inspired words of the sainted Grigori Efimovich? Alexandra devoted herself to her task with joy and enthusiasm, dipped her diamond-studded pen into the magnificent ink-well, and as she transferred her divine "Friend's" account of his journeyings to her morocco-bound album, the characteristic red patches appeared on her cheeks, and her breath came in short gasps.

THOUGHTS ON MY PILGRIMAGE

*In the Kievo-Pecherskaia Lavra **

"I have arrived at the holy Lavra of Kiev from St. Petersburg, and I call St. Petersburg the world. But the world is full of trivial thoughts, while here in the monastery are calm and peace. When the picture of the Mother of God descends, when the anthem rings out, heart and soul are lost, and the trivial is forgotten.

"I also went to the caves, and saw simplicity there; there is neither gold nor silver, and the martyrs of God sleep in simple wooden coffins. And I thought how superfluity only oppresses us and evokes weariness in us: God has blessed these wonderful caves; his hand hollowed them out of the rock, and there the holy men hid from their enemies.

"Even now the holy man has many enemies, for brother fights against brother, and no one will leave another in peace. In earlier days, in the time of the martyrs, true believers were oppressed by strangers and the heathen; but now we ourselves torment one another, now priest persecutes priest, and sons, fathers. Thus is fulfilled the word of God about the approach of the end.

"And Job saw in the caves, how his cell was small and narrow,

* *Lavra* means "monastery."

but he was happy, calm, and patient in the midst of his tribulations. If we too would take refuge with our spirit in simplicity, and pray to God in a narrow cell, then we might be partakers of the Lord.

At Sea

"What shall I say about the peace of the ocean? As I put forth from Odessa, a wonderful quietude at once surrounded me, my soul rejoiced in the sea and slumbered softly. I saw how the little waves glittered, and I desired to seek no further. When I rose in the morning, the waves spoke to me, and their movement refreshed my heart. And as the sun slowly rises from the sea, in its light the soul of man forgets all sorrow, and understands the book and the wisdom of life. The sea makes us forget the trivial; it compels us to think of many things, and our thoughts come of themselves, without effort and difficulty. The sea is without bounds; but human wisdom too knows no limit.

"It is most beautiful when the sun is just about to sink its rays into the sea. It disappears behind the mountains, twilight comes on, and a marvellous peace broods over the waters. The voices of birds are dumb; but man remembers his childhood, compares this quietness with the noise of the world, and talks softly to himself.

"And then, after no shrub and no leaf has been visible for a long time, a shore appears, and man rejoices afresh in the nature of God and praises the Creator, who has made all these things.

"When the waves rise higher, the soul is uneasy; man loses his clear consciousness, and paces helplessly round the ship as in a fog. But the same sickness attacks us on land also, only we know nothing about it, for there the same wave lifts us, but we do not see it. But at sea all mark the sickness, while on shore it remains concealed. For the devil tempts our soul, but conscience is a great wave, and even if there were no waves on the sea, still the waves rise and fall in us.

In Constantinople

"What can I, with my poor human understanding, say of the splendid and marvellous Cathedral of Saint Sophia? Like a

cloud on the horizon is this Cathedral. Woe unto us that God's wrath at our pride was so great that He surrendered this shrine to the unbelieving Turk! May the Lord hear my prayer and restore to us this Church, so that it may be his Ark!

"In this Cathedral is also to be seen the pulpit of St. John the Evangelist, and also the bones of St. Efim and the pillar to which the Saviour was chained. We stand on the spot where St. John once preached, and it is as if we still hear his voice.

"In Constantinople there is also a church where St. Andrew, who, out of love for the Saviour, played the madman, had a vision of the Mother of God. I went to the place; but saw only a little bit of wall, some ruins and a garden, by which a Greek church stands. My heart was moved when I thought how the Mother of God protected Her faithful servants. To-day, Her one anxiety is still to comfort us and grant us Her grace. She appears to the good and to the sinful, She hears all our prayers, knows our sorrows, and prays for us before the throne of God.

"In Constantinople there is also a column which was brought from Rome; it weighs a thousand *pud.* All this is a great marvel, and I can only write very little about it.

On the Journey through the Mediterranean

"We came to Mitylene. It is a little town where the Apostle Paul preached and kindled the flame of faith in the souls of the thirty martyrs. It lies very prettily by the sea, on a hill above the water. May God lead us by his ways! The farther we come, the more often do we arrive at places where the soul can be saved. It is plain that the Russian does not in vain save his kopeks to visit these holy places.

"I have encountered many people, and, especially in the third class, have met true Christian women, who read the Holy Scriptures day and night, so that it is a real joy. There are also Bulgarians who truly believe in the Kingdom of God and love the Lord Jesus. I have convinced myself that the Turks wear much the same clothes as the Christians and the Jews. I believe that even for them the words of God will be fulfilled, and that then, in spite of the apparent difference in clothing, there will be only one single Orthodox Church.

"Smyrna lies on the Asiatic coast at the head of a large gulf. It has some very beautiful Greek churches, including one on the spot where the woman of Samaria, after her talk with James, began to believe in the Saviour. Then there is also a church on the place where the Mother of God preached; there, too, repose the bones of St. George.

"Not far from Smyrna are the ruins of the town of Ephesus; there the Apostle John lived, there he finished his Gospel, and, therefore, the sea beats the more strongly against the shore, to awaken life from its sleep. Not far from Ephesus is the island of Chios, where St. Isidor died a martyr's death in the third century.

"We crossed the Mediterranean, and our steamer stopped nowhere else. God! How the Apostles kindled the flame of faith and made innumerable disciples everywhere on these coasts! But the Greeks were too proud of their philosophy, and so God punished them by transferring power to the Turks.

"The Greek bishops can all read and write, and can conduct divine service excellently; the services here are very ceremonious. But poverty in spirit is a higher thing. The bishop, who is not of the poor in spirit, weeps when he does not receive a cross; but who bears the cross in himself is fair even in his simple robe and enjoys the love of the people. Why do so many people to-day fall away into strange faiths? Because the spirit no longer lives in the Church—there are many letters and the Temple is empty. Many bishops are afraid of being confounded with simple monks; but the monks are lazy and wax fat in their cloisters."

"The town of Rhodes is full of splendid gardens, in which flowers and trees are in bloom in the middle of February. Great are the mercies of God in this place!

"The town of Tripolis lies on the sea, and is surrounded by mountains; indeed, it is nothing but a fortress like our Fortress of SS. Peter and Paul. Beirut too lies on the coast, all covered with verdure. It was there that St. George slew the dragon, and on the spot there is now a Turkish mosque. The lake is overgrown with grass. It is a misfortune when God punishes Christianity with his wrath.

"Jaffa is the town where the Prophet Elias lived. On the hill

where he used to pray stands a monastery, and I have also visited the place where the fire descended from Heaven.

In Jerusalem

"I have reached the end of my journeying, and have arrived in the Holy City of Jerusalem. After passing from the great waves of the sea into the earthly paradise of peace, I first of all held a divine service. I cannot describe my joy, for ink is powerless in the face of so much happiness.

"It is true that many sad thoughts also come over me when I see how people here go about in strange clothes which recall old times. Here, in these churches, the Saviour Himself shed tears!

"What am I to say about the minutes as I approached the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ? I felt that this tomb is a tomb of love; before it the heart is spiritualized, and we see before us all the people we love, and they too feel happy and at peace in that moment, no matter where they may be. God, Thou Thyself shalt rise from the depths of sin, for eternity lives in Thee!

"I have also been to Golgotha; on the spot where the Mother of God wept as Her Son was nailed to the Cross, now stands the Church of the Resurrection. My God, we will sin no more, save us by Thy Passion!

"We were taken to the palace of the Patriarch, where our feet were washed. We all had tears in our eyes at being shown in so wise a way that man must be humble. May God teach us humility and make us his pupils!"

"We saw the house of Judas and the house of Pilate, which are not far from one another. Then, amid a great crowd, we went to the vault of the holy Mother of God, kissed the tomb, and sang joyfully. We saw plainly before us the scene enacted here when the might of Heaven took to itself the pure body of the Virgin. Joseph is also buried in the same vault, as it is written in the Scriptures: 'Here rests a marvellous old man.' Great old man, pray to God for us!

"Next we went to the Garden of Gethsemane, in which the Saviour groaned and prayed before His death. We unworthy ones greeted this place, and bowed in devotion at the thought

that our Lord Jesus Christ here shed tears of blood. God save us, and have pity upon us in Thine heart! Then we saw the stones on which the disciples slept until Christ came to awaken them. But we sleep eternally in sin—awaken us, Lord God!

"Oh! the mercy of the holy Easter festival! How yearningly believers await the great procession of the Cross. Thousands of peoples and nationalities assemble here waiting for the holy light; all around stand Turkish troops and kavasses.

"Then comes the great moment; the Patriarch takes off his robes, draws on a shirt, and approaches the Holy Sepulchre. With tears in their eyes the crowd wait until he returns with the burning candles. Then all are happy and joyful, and light their candles at the holy light, and take them back to their houses. God, give me a good memory, so that I may never forget this moment!

"How wonderful it is to be on sacred ground, what a believer a man would be here, even if he stayed only a few months! Of course, it is impossible to see everything even in a year, if we are lazy, for God does not give ear to the lazy, even if they live for centuries. The holy shrine loves fear.

"Wine is very cheap here, and is drunk freely because it costs almost nothing. We went to the river Jordan, bathed in its waters, and saw the desert to which the Egyptian Mary fled for refuge. At the place where the Saviour was baptized we all descended to the water and thought of the remission of sins. Many ran trembling to the banks of the Jordan in order to win the remission of all their sins. God, cleanse us in the waters of Thy river Jordan!

"We also saw the Dead Sea. The punishment of God rests upon it, and we were seized with fear and terror at the sight of it. There is only water to be seen, not a beast, insect, or fish; we saw all this and wept. In the Jordan desert is also the spring of the Prophet Isaiah; but the kavass did not take us there, as he was cross with us.

"On a high mountain in this place, where Satan tried to tempt the Lord, now rises a marvellous monastery, where you are also shown the stone on which the Devil stood. We meditated on the suffering of the Saviour; but now spirits are sold at the place. Cunning Satan knows how to seduce the faithful! On the way

we also passed a great oak tree; there Abraham welcomed the Saviour with bread and salt. We bowed before the tree, kissed it, and held a service before it. Half the trunk is rotted away, but God performed a miracle, so that after thousands of years some parts of the tree are still green and flourishing.

"According to Turkish stories, there is a remnant of Noah's Ark on the shore at Jaffa. This Ark is a symbol of the salvation of Christianity, and for us too the words of Noah are fulfilled. The true faith is our salvation, and everyone who listens to the call of the Saviour will find redemption.

"In Bethlehem there is a large church with many pulpits and various conveniences for other nationalities, but no provision whatever is made for us Russians. But before the manger where the Saviour lay we forgot our fatigue and everything disagreeable. We kissed the holy manger, and in our joy could hardly believe that God had been so gracious as to allow us to see the place where Christ was born.

"We were also shown the pit in which the Innocents were slain at Herod's command. We thought with horror of this evil deed and burst into tears. What must the mothers have felt when the soldiers took away their children and murdered them! Envy and malice are still ever in our hearts, and the truth awaits the rising of the sun like a grain of sand in an autumn night.

"Everywhere in the holy places we found many peoples; they are clever; but not strong in faith and love. We must be very friendly to them, and direct their souls to love and Heaven; then God will save them also. We must give an example of love, then we shall again be Christians, as in the first years after the death of the Saviour, and our mission will serve Good and not gold. These foreign people understand very well when we speak to them, and our words are marvellously reflected in them. But of course you must know the language and the ways of a people in order to be able to talk to them about God, for as a bell without silver has a discordant sound, so too the words of a preacher may do much harm if he lacks the proper experience.

"The greatest thing in the world is love, and only through love can we find the way to Heaven. A morsel of bread is often more important and precious to men than a great ship!

"The steamers are full of the faithful; each of them bears spiritual force in a corner of his heart. When he gets home he will talk about Jerusalem, and then the fear of God will awaken in the hearts of the children, and they will learn to love their Tsar and their home.

"More attention must also be paid to the pilgrims; travelling should be cheaper, and things should be so arranged that pilgrims are provided with a meal once a day, and boiling water for making tea is supplied free of charge. At present they are treated like cattle and shut up in hundreds in the hold of the ships; thus they have to endure many discomforts for the sake of the holy shrines. It is easy, of course, for the rich, for they have plenty of money and live in beautiful rooms. The authorities should take an interest in the poor pilgrims, for it is their faith that upholds the Empire.

"For this reason it is necessary that hostels should be built for the poor people, in which they can live like brothers. The simple pilgrim pays homage to the holy shrine, and then, full of faith, returns to his village and proclaims the truth to the people there. His simple talk awakens love for God in his home district also; the young people listen to his words and feel love and piety growing in their hearts.

"I also saw the Easter festival of the Catholics in Jerusalem, which was celebrated a week before ours. But this festival was not to be compared with that of the Orthodox Church. The Catholics did not look at all joyful, while at ours all the world, even the beasts, rejoiced on that day. Oh! we Orthodox believers are happy, and our faith is more beautiful than any other. The faces of the Catholics were gloomy even during the Easter festival, and so I think that their souls also do not truly rejoice.

"I do not want to compare the two religions with each other and condemn the Catholics, but I feel that in Russia everybody is happy when the church bells ring and when the holy spring-time blossoms for us all. . . ."

CHAPTER VIII

STAIRCASE NOTES

AS Rasputin's political and social influence grew, his flat became the centre of manifold and multifarious interests.

While he was still living on the Nevski Prospekt, in the lodging rented for him by his disciple, Bashmakova, and even afterwards, when he stayed in the Kirochnaia, the authorities did not pay much attention to his house. But in later years, after the starets had, with amazing swiftness, become a personage of supreme importance, his house was not only thronged by visitors, but also carefully watched by the police.

The police had kept an eye on his quarters on the English Prospect, where he was living at the beginning of the war; but his new flat in the Gorokhovaia was under particularly strict surveillance, for the new Prime Minister, Stürmer, had informed Globichev, the chief of the Secret Service, that Rasputin must be guarded as closely as a member of the imperial family. "This is the express wish of the Emperor and Empress," added Stürmer, and it was not surprising, therefore, that "64 Gorokhovaia" was hereafter besieged by secret service men.

In the concierge's lodge and on the staircase—amid a steamy cloud of indefinable smells, in which the sourish odour of cabbage soup and rancid butter sometimes predominated, and sometimes the smell of hot sheep's cheese—lounged, day in, day out, four or five—or even ten or twenty—badly dressed men; their old-fashioned collars and ties, as well as their studiously inconspicuous bearing, proclaimed them detectives a mile away. The other people living in the house and Rasputin's frequent visitors knew every one of these agents, and had ceased to take any special notice of them; many, as the result of some chance conversation, were even on a friendly footing with them. The officials, for their part, gave up the attempt to conceal their profes-

sion from the regular habitués of the house, and, when one of them came through the gate and hurried up the steps, they did not stir from their easy, sleepy posture.

Sometimes one of the other people in the house made a break in the monotonous existence of the police on the staircase: the sempstress Katia would come out of Flat 31, or Mr. Neustein from the floor above would come down and talk to the agents. Occasionally Utilia, the masseuse, or another woman from the neighbourhood, would turn up, and then time passed quickly and comfortably round the steaming, dirty, tin samovar, in the lodge of Yuravleva, the concierge's wife. Katia, Utilia, the masseuse, and she would gossip about the starets, and give the latest news of him; other women would want to know exactly how the holy man lived, and the police were thus able to perform some part of their tedious duty in friendly chat with the women. The sempstress, Katia, and Utilia had much that was singular and interesting to impart about Rasputin, for it often happened that this darling of the fine ladies would weary of the society of grand duchesses, countesses, and beautiful actresses, and would knock at Katia's door, or send for Utilia, to keep him company for the night.

The porter's wife also knew a great deal about the peculiarities of the holy man. When, late at night, he came home drunk from a carousal, and Katia had refused to let him in and Utilia was not available, Grigori Efimovich would embrace the porter's wife, smother her with kisses, and press her with importunities which she modestly declined to describe any further.

The gatekeepers, in particular, through their peep-hole, noticed many things that escaped the detectives; and they received a salary from the police to report everything that occurred. Thus they could not only indulge in their love of gossip, but also take pride in having done their duty to the authorities. The sempstress and the masseuse, moreover, were all the more ready to report their experiences, as these reached the highest dignitaries of the Empire, through the police reports, and they thus acquired an unlooked-for importance.

Mr. Neustein often came out of his flat and drew the agents into conversation. He had very little to tell, in fact; but he had

a way peculiarly his own of speaking in obscure hints, behind which a deeper meaning might well be hidden. The detectives did not think themselves called upon to decide whether this was really so: they took down every utterance of Mr. Neustein word for word; their superiors could decide what was to be made of these strange insinuations!

Thus, for example, one note runs: "24th January. Neustein, who lives on the same stair, said to us in passing: 'Your patron will soon be sent to Tsarskoe Selo, to light all the church candles there.'"

But it seldom happened that the activities of the agents had to be confined to noting conversations with Mr. Neustein. Innumerable visitors were generally entering or leaving the house, and the spies had no easy task in keeping up with the record of their names. If a new visitor came through the gate they did everything they could not to seem like detectives. For this purpose they would stage impromptu little comedies, hurry up the stairs as if they themselves were visiting the starets, or come down in careless groups, and remain standing before the house, absorbed in innocent conversation. But, as soon as the visitor passed through Rasputin's door, an excited whispering and a mysterious questioning began on the staircase: one spy asked the other if he knew the new guest; they all put their heads together and combined to give the fullest possible report. Pencils and notebooks flew out of pockets, and the stranger was described in the greatest detail: his hat, his clothes, the colour of his hair, and whether he carried an umbrella or a parcel. The parcels were particularly important, and every agent made it a point of honour to discover their contents. Their reports to their superior officers swarm with notes about parcels, baskets, etc.:

"10th January. Anastasia Shapovalenkova, the wife of a doctor, has given Rasputin a carpet."

"23rd January. An unknown clergyman brought fish for Rasputin."

"28th January. Councillor von Bok brought Rasputin a case of wine."

"21st February. Nikolai Glazov visited Rasputin to-day, and brought a parcel containing several bottles of wine."

"14th March. Simanovich, Rasputin's secretary, came with a box containing six bottles of wine, caviare, and cheese."

"14th June. The Inspector of the National School of Tsarskoe Selo appeared here to-day with a basket of wine."

When several visitors turned up at the same time, it was the detectives' job to overhear as much as possible of the conversation between them. Every one of their sentences, even though only half-heard and misunderstood, was faithfully noted in their reports, whether it had any meaning or not. They kept a sharp look-out for the words and facial expressions with which Dunia, Rasputin's maid, received the visitors; Dunia's friendly or unfriendly attitude as she showed them out also made it possible to draw inferences about how they had been received by the starets.

The spies devoted themselves with praiseworthy diligence to their difficult task of throwing the fullest possible light on the life and personality of unknown people during their brief passage from the house door to the door of Rasputin's flat. They noted down every imaginable trifle in the utmost detail, trying, by the enumeration of the greatest possible number of unimportant external features, to capture the incomprehensible and mysterious lives of perfect strangers. Sometimes they were lucky and succeeded in entering in a conversation with the unknown. Many petitioners were garrulous, especially after they left the starets, either with joy over the granting of a petition or with wrath at a refusal. On these occasions the reports would run:

"3rd November. An unknown woman visited Rasputin in order to try to prevent her husband, a lieutenant at present in hospital, from being transferred from St. Petersburg. When she left she gave an account, in the concierge's lodge, of the strange way in which Rasputin had received her: 'A servant opened the door to me and showed me into a room, where Rasputin, whom I had never seen before, appeared immediately. He told me at once to take off my things. I complied with his wish, and went with him into an adjoining room. He hardly listened to my request; but kept on touching my face and breast and asking me to kiss him. Then he wrote a note but did not give it to me, say-

ing that he was displeased with me and bidding me come back next day.' "

"3rd December. Madame Leikart visited Rasputin for the first time to-day, to ask him to intervene on her husband's behalf. Rasputin proposed that she should kiss him; she refused, however, and departed. Then the mistress of Senator Mamontov arrived; Rasputin asked her to return at 1 a. m."

"29th January. The wife of Colonel Tatarinov visited Rasputin, and afterwards told the detectives that the starets embraced and kissed a young girl in her presence; she found the incident so painful that she has decided never to visit Rasputin again."

"18th January. The Greek lady, Madame Karavia, and her daughter tried to secure an audience with Rasputin. On the way down the two ladies burst into abuse of him, called him a cursed peasant, and said they had been present when Rasputin caused a great scandal by his appearance at the Villa Rode wearing only a shirt. They also said that a young person had appeared at Tsarskoe Selo who would soon put Rasputin in the shade."

"30th January. The priest from the church on the Lublianka, accompanied by an unknown man, visited Rasputin to-day. The priest was intervening in some affair for this unknown man, and asked Rasputin to make a personal visit to the Minister of the Interior and Senator Beletski: Rasputin, however, refused, and merely wrote a letter. As they went away the priest was making fun of Rasputin, because he found it so difficult to put pen to paper."

"5th February. When Sofia Karavia left Rasputin's flat she said to the detectives: 'He is in a bad humour, although he has just carried out a good stroke of business. He has arranged some matter or other for Rubinstein, the banker, who has given him fifty thousand roubles in return.' Rasputin also promised Karavia herself that he would use his influence on her behalf with the minister Shakhovskoi."

"7th February. Popermann, the merchant, came to see Rasputin to-day, and as soon as he came in he asked what was the matter with the miraculous monk. Neustein, who lives on the

same staircase, also asked if it were true that an officer had beaten Rasputin at the station."

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Whenever a messenger arrived from Tsarskoe Selo or one of the ministries or banks it was a happy moment for the detectives. The messenger was stopped on the stairs before he had time to ring the bell. The spies then inquired in an impressive, confidential, and urgent manner where he came from, who had sent him, at what time he left the house of his superior, and what message he brought. Afterwards they carefully opened the envelope in the concierge's lodge and noted the contents in their books; the letter was then skilfully gummed up again and the messenger at last permitted to ring the bell of Rasputin's flat.

When the messenger, after discharging his errand, once more appeared on the staircase, he was immediately besieged by the detectives. They ran down the steps with him, accompanied him through the courtyard to the street, and excitedly tried to discover who had received him in the flat and taken the document from him. If Rasputin had attended to the matter himself, they questioned the messenger exhaustively about his expression as he read the letter, and they also wanted to know what he had said, and whether there were any other people in the room. If the messenger was carrying a written answer this was opened straightway in the concierge's lodge and then returned to him.

The postmen knew their duty, for they had been ordered by their superior officers to allow all letters or telegrams addressed to Rasputin to be examined in the concierge's lodge, before they reached their destination. But Rasputin's own servants also used to stop for a moment when their master sent them out on an errand, and tell the police agents what the business was. If they were taking a letter or a telegram to the post office they first gave it to the spies, who made a copy of it. Their notebooks are full of reports about Rasputin's correspondence; his peculiar telegrams, in particular, partly composed of biblical texts and partly of dry business information, were minutely recorded:

"1st January. Rasputin sent a telegram to the village elder of Pokrovskoe in the Tobolsk Government: 'Have secured the

concession for you to have the forest. You may proceed to cut as soon as you receive the permit.' "

"10th January. Rasputin sent the following telegram: 'Anna Vyubova, Tsarskoe Selo. Although not with you in person am present in the spirit and send an angel to console and comfort you.' "

"13th January. Rasputin sent the following telegram to Vyubova at Tsarskoe Selo: 'God himself allows me to proclaim the true joy. The way to truth will always be with my children. I do not know whether I shall live to see it.' "

"18th February. Rasputin despatched the following telegram: 'Vyubova, Tsarskoe Selo. Tell Madame Golovina to come to see me to-morrow at 3 o'clock.' "

"30th March. Rasputin sent the following telegram to Moscow: 'Princess Tenisheva. I rejoice at your frankness. Kisses to my dear one.' "

"Rasputin also telegraphed to Elena Dianumova: 'My darling, am with you in spirit, kiss you.' "

"12th May. Rasputin telegraphed to the Governor of Tobolsk: 'For the last three months a suspicious person has been living in my village of Pokrovskoe. Send your answer to Vyubova at Tsarskoe Selo.' "

"11th October. Rasputin telegraphed to Varnava: 'Mind the spy.' "

Rasputin's servants, stimulated by copious bribes, gave the detectives the most exact information possible about what went on inside the flat. If conferences of some length or parties were taking place in Rasputin's room, the housemaid, Dunia, would slip softly out into the passage, where she was immediately surrounded and questioned. Often there were very curious things to report, which made the poor spies gasp with amazement. Such moments richly made up for their long and tedious hours of fruitless waiting; and they greedily noted down the maid's reports of the shameless and disorderly scenes enacted in the flat:

"16th January. During the visit of the Pistol Kors family, Rasputin took the prostitute Gregubova on his knee and murmured something to himself."

"In the night of 17th to 18th January Maria Gill, the wife of a Captain in the 145th Regiment, slept at Rasputin's."

Jan
16

"26th January. This evening a ball took place at Rasputin's in honour of some persons who had been released from prison, at which behaviour was very indecorous. The guests sang and danced till morning."

17-18
26

"16th March. About 1 a. m. eight men and women called on Rasputin and stayed till three. The whole company sang and danced; when they were all drunk, they left the house accompanied by Rasputin."

March
16

"3rd April. About 1 a. m. Rasputin brought an unknown woman back to the house; she spent the night with him."

April
3

"11th May. Rasputin brought a prostitute back to the flat and locked her in his room; the servants, however, afterwards let her out."

May
11

"On the night of 25th to 26th November Varvarova, the actress, slept at Rasputin's."

Nov
25-26

The detectives did not, however, always succeed in giving such a clear and unequivocal account of the meaning and significance of what went on in Rasputin's flat. The maid was frequently unable to get into touch with them, or else she knew nothing definite about the visitors' objects. Then there was nothing for the police to do but to make an exact note of the time of every visitor's arrival and departure:

"8th February. Madame Soloviev arrived at 10, Maria Golovina at 10.10, and the Princess Tatiana Shakhovskaia at 11.50; the last went away again fifty minutes later. At 12 precisely Rasputin received his private secretary, Simanovich; at 12.10 the wife of Staff-Captain Sandetski arrived and left in ten minutes; at 12 o'clock the singer Derevenski also appeared; at 12.20 Laptinskaia left, and at 12.40 an unknown man in uniform arrived in a motor to fetch Rasputin."

"At 1.35 Privy Councillor and Senator Mamontov called, and at 1.40 Basilevskaia accompanied by Gar; both ladies remained an hour and a half with Rasputin. At 2 o'clock Simanovich called with a man in uniform, but departed again at the end of twenty minutes. Then an officer's wife came and stopped twenty-five minutes; at 3.30 Simanovich turned up for the third time and

stayed for half an hour; at 4.10 Knirsche came with some bottles of wine; at 5 o'clock Mesdames Turovich and Chervinskaia, at 5.10 Madame Soloviev, and at 6.20 Simanovich arrived for the fourth time. At 6.45 Reshetnikov came; at 7.20 an unknown lady; at 9.30 Dobrovolskaia, at 10 Katarina Bermann; at 10.10 Madame Turovich and her husband, and 11.10 Knirsche. At 11.15 five more people turned up, so that twenty-five people altogether were assembled in Rasputin's flat."

"9th February. The guests departed at 3 a. m. At 9.45 Anna Vyrubova called; at 10.25 Dobrovolskaia; at 10.50 the Golovin ladies, and at 11 Maria Gar. Dobrovolskaia remained for three hours, ten minutes, Gar only two hours. At 11.40 Manuilov and Ossipenko turned up with an unknown official in military car No. 5064, and stayed for thirty minutes. At 12 Dobrovolski called and stayed an hour and forty-five minutes; at 12.30 Bishop Varnava and Bishop Augustin arrived in a motor (No. 127); they both remained forty minutes with Rasputin."

"10th February. At midnight yesterday a man, apparently Manuilov, called on Rasputin, but soon left. At 11 a. m. Vishniakova came with an unknown lady, but was not admitted. At 11.40 Maria Golovina called and at 11.45 the maid of honour, Lydia Nikitina. At 12.40 Gar came with a lady, and at 1.20 Madame Soloviev, also accompanied by an unknown lady. At 2 o'clock Rasputin sent for motor No. 224 and departed in it at 2.10 with Maria Golovina."

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The detectives thought it especially important to make exact notes of the movements of the wonder-monk himself, his appearance, his moods, and his talk. Rasputin frequently appeared in the hall in untidy house clothes, and visited the concierge's wife or Katia, the sempstress; on these occasions his powerful figure wandering about the house at the urge of sensual desire had something of a great wild beast about it. The agents of course confined themselves to sober statements of this kind:

"9th May. Rasputin sent the concierge's wife for the masseuse, but she refused to come. He then went himself to Katia, the sempstress, who lives in the house, and asked her to 'keep him company.' The sempstress refused, she had no costume, but

Rasputin said, 'Come to me next week and I will give *you* fifty roubles.' "

"2nd June. Rasputin sent the porter's wife to fetch the masseuse, Utilia, but she was not at home. Whereupon he betook himself to the sempstress Katia in Flat 31. He was apparently refused admittance, for he came down the stairs again, and asked the porter's wife to kiss him. She, however, disengaged herself from his embrace, and rang his flat bell, whereupon the servant appeared and put Rasputin to bed."

When Grigori Efimovich left his flat, either to go to church or to the baths, or when a car came to the door to take him to the Villa Rode or to Tsarskoe Selo, he was dressed in a decent and festive manner, and wore a long, black caftan, costly furs, snow-boots, and a beaver cap. At such times he seemed like a dignified "barin" to the detectives, and they would almost have felt sincere respect for him if his wrinkled, weather-tanned face had not always betrayed the peasant.

As the flat door opened and Rasputin's powerful figure appeared in the hall, a wave of excitement passed over the waiting, shabbily dressed crowd; they would bow, lift their hats, and many would hurry up to him and wish him a friendly and familiar "Good-morning."

He replied to their greeting cordially and with an indulgent smile. He knew them all, and had been accustomed for years to encounter them on the staircase or in the concierge's lodge, whenever he entered or left the house. He could also distinguish clearly between the various spies, of which there were several sets: the agents in the pay of Globichev, the Chief of the Okhrana, the officials of the police department of Colonel Komisarov, those of the Court Agency of General Spiridovich, and, in addition, the special confidential agents of the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior, the large banks, the stockbrokers, and the foreign ambassadors. As all of these people distrusted one another, they tried to keep informed of Rasputin's life and business through a secret service of their own.

Grigori Efimovich was flattered by this multifarious attention devoted to his person. Not only did this horde of detectives ensure his safety, it also made him more conscious of his own

significance and importance. A self-satisfied smirk passed over his lips whenever he thought how sincerely concerned all Russia was over his life, and what large sums of money were regularly expended to protect him.

Of course, the other side of this surveillance was not hidden from his sound peasant mind, and he was well aware that he was not only protected, but also a prisoner, and could hardly take any step without the important Government offices and personages in the whole of St. Petersburg knowing all about it next day.

But this twofold activity of the police officials who, on the one hand, watched over his safety, and on the other hand, spied on him, in the latter case always trying to get the better of each other, no longer troubled Rasputin, and did not even cause him to impose any particular restraint on himself before them. He showed himself to them exactly as he was, and displayed the undisturbed, frank candour which had won him the confidence of his sovereigns, the hate and fear of his enemies, and the devoted love of his women worshippers. He had no objection to all the gentlemen and ladies of the Court, the ministers, superintendents of police, and bank directors knowing exactly how often he came home drunk in a week, or when a fine lady or a little sewing-woman spent the night with him.

His friends at police headquarters and in the ministries often retailed to him the agents' reports, without his showing any particular interest; but frequently, if he found that they had given unnecessary details or misunderstood things, he would get rather angry, take the spy in question to task, and abuse him with a few strong peasant oaths and, in the end, ask him in a conciliatory tone to refrain from such reports in future.

The detectives, with their mechanical devotion to duty, gave full details of such reprimands:

"14th January. At 4.30 p. m. Rasputin drove to Tsarskoe Selo with Rubinstein, the banker, and two ladies. To the agent who accompanied them he remarked in a displeased tone: 'One of you reported to your superiors that I took a lady on my knee. It is not proper for you to report things like that. It is your duty to protect me, not to spread gossip of that kind about me.' "

But apart from such little misunderstandings Rasputin was

Scene

on very friendly terms with the men who watched over him. Often, it is true, he took a childish pleasure in evading their surveillance; he would slip quietly out of his flat with a sly smile on his lips, hurry down the back stairs with great strides at a moment when they were unguarded, and throw himself into a passing droshky. When he succeeded in playing this trick he would, on his return, chaff the detective he had fooled and tell him all sorts of hair-raising tales about where he had been, what misdeeds he had been guilty of, and what important business he had dispatched, without their knowing anything at all about it. "What would the ladies at Court," he would cry with good-humoured mockery, "the worthy ministers and bank directors, not give to discover where I have been to-day and what I have done."

Hear

Occasionally, however, he took pity on the everlasting, devouring curiosity of his spies, and of his own free will gave them a true account of what they had failed to learn. In the course of time he came to feel sincere confidence in Major-General Globichev's agents in particular; they were allowed to accompany him to church or to the baths in the morning and, on the way, he often discussed very important political or private affairs with them. He was pleased with the devotion they displayed, for he felt with sure instinct that they were not only doing their duty in trying to win his confidence, but that they also found real and sincere pleasure in his society. These poor, badly paid little officials were often royally entertained by Rasputin's conversation, when he cracked his strange and often coarse jokes, or retailed to them the gossip of the Court and high society.

Of course, this personal attachment did not prevent the spies from reporting matters which he had expressly asked them to suppress. They promised to respect his wishes; and they reported not only the things that were to be concealed, but also the fact that Rasputin had asked them to be discreet. But, in spite of everything, they were very friendly to each other: the detectives liked their Grigori Efimovich and Grigori Efimovich liked his detectives, his special favourites being Terekhov, Svistunoy, Popov, and Ivanov.

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While, at the beginning, Rasputin had talked to the detectives only on the way to church or to the baths or in chance encounters, but kept his flat closed against their prying eyes, he later felt such confidence in them that he sometimes even admitted them to his rooms. This fact acquired very great importance on the occasion of his name-day in 1916: Colonel Komisarov had strictly enjoined on his agents that they must gain admittance into the flat whatever happened, and make a detailed report of everything that took place. For police headquarters expected that presents would arrive from the "highest personages," and hoped to be able to draw certain inferences from this fact.

Very early in the morning of the great day the detectives were already pacing anxiously up and down the hall, racking their brains to find a means of getting into the flat. After some time, Rasputin appeared on the staircase with his little niece Aniushka. He was in good humour, suffered the company of a number of detectives on the way to early mass, and talked to them in the friendliest possible fashion. On arriving at Rasputin's door after the service, the detectives officiously set about helping little Aniushka off with her coat, Rasputin looking on indulgently. In this way several of them, to the keen envy of their colleagues, stepped over the threshold into the hall.

Rasputin was absolutely overwhelmed with pleasant messages that forenoon. Hardly had he entered when his family, beaming with joy, rushed up to show him the beautiful and costly presents that had arrived in his absence. Immediately after, the telephone bell rang: it was Anna Vyrubova to wish her "revered Father" every happiness and say that she was coming to see him immediately. Almost at the same moment a telegraph messenger brought a telegram of warmest congratulations from the Emperor and Empress.

All these joyful greetings coming together made Rasputin uncommonly happy and pleased. His eyes shone, for he felt himself to be more loved and honoured than ever. He turned to the agents with a friendly smile, and invited them to drink a glass of Madeira to his health, stay for a little, make themselves at home, and enjoy themselves with him.

The detectives required no second invitation. They drank

*A sign
to learn
that he
was
feeling
like
God.
The
Goodman
must always
be praised.*

Rasputin's wine with respectful gratitude, and admired his presents; nor did they fail surreptitiously to write down as exact a description of them as possible in their notebooks. There were all sorts of objects made of gold and silver, carpets, table cutlery and silver, jewellery for Rasputin's wife and daughters, beautiful furniture, pictures, wines, cakes, and other delicacies; each gift was accompanied by the card of the donor. With mild astonishment the police saw the cards of their own superiors, Colonel Komisarov, General Globichev, various ministers and other high dignitaries, alongside those of distinguished ladies, actresses, bankers, diplomats, and financiers.

Pencils became feverishly active, even more so when a great number of visitors arrived, and the festive breakfast began. Speeches were made in which the importance of Rasputin for the welfare of Russia was extolled in the highest terms; Rasputin himself beamed with contentment and drank to every new arrival, until finally, towards evening, he collapsed, exhausted by his great strain. However, after a few hours' rest, he continued the festivities on a more intimate scale, until at last not a single one of the participators in the party was sober.

The police spies had been drawn into the universal transports and, encouraged by Rasputin, had diligently applied themselves to the wine. Soon, however, they had to resume their official duties, this time not as spies on, but as protectors of, Rasputin. Towards morning two men forced their way into the house with revolvers drawn and declared that their wives were spending the night with the starets, and that they had come to avenge this dishonour. The agents had to rush to warn Rasputin and the two ladies, detain the intruders for a little, get the ladies safely down the back stairs, and then prove to the furious husbands that Rasputin was alone in his rooms.

But such special occasions were not always necessary to secure the detectives admittance to Rasputin's rooms. Often it happened merely because Grigori Efimovich was bored. Then he himself would invite the agents to keep him company, and would converse with them on every possible topic, even on matters of supreme political importance.

One of these conversations was so momentous that the chief

Scene
↓ then
referred

of police, on reading the report of it, became rigid with amazement, and, when he had recovered somewhat from his bewilderment, rushed off to inform the Minister.

Rasputin had returned home drunk in the early morning, staggered into his flat, and tried to sleep off his debauch. But he had a violent headache and could not sleep, so he came out into the hall again, and invited the detectives to have tea with him. Agreeably surprised, they followed him and took their places round the steaming samovar. For a time Rasputin sat silent and meditative, resting his head, heavy with wine, on his hand. At last one of the detectives said: "Grigori Efimovich, why are you so melancholy? What are you thinking about?"

"They have told me," answered Rasputin, staring uneasily in front of him, "that I must consider what is to happen about the Imperial Duma. I don't know what to do. What do you think?"

The agent to whom Rasputin addressed this unexpected question replied evasively: "I have no right to think, Grigori Efimovich, I might very easily get myself into trouble with my superior officers."

Rasputin ruminated for a few minutes longer, then turned suddenly to the spy and growled: "Do you know what? I shall send the Tsar to the Duma, to open it in person. If he goes and addresses the deputies himself, they will not dare to make bad speeches."

The arrival of this report at police headquarters acted like a bomb, for it coincided with the announcement of the amazing decision of the Tsar, in defiance of all custom, to open the Duma in person. The plan the starets had conceived under the influence of a headache after a night's carousal had caused the sovereign to take a step of supreme political importance.

But it was only very occasionally, of course, that the detectives' reports were as important as this. Generally, they were confined to trifling statements about when Grigori Efimovich rose, who visited him, when he left the house, and in what state he returned in the early morning, drunk or sober, accompanied by women or alone.

Under date of December 24th the detectives noted: "About 7 p.m. Ossipenko, the secretary of the Metropolitan Pitirim, called

on Rasputin; about an hour later came princess Shakhovskaia, Alexandra von Pistolkors, and an unknown officer in a car, in which they all went off together. At eight a car stopped before Rasputin's house with the Countess Olga Kreuz and the daughter of State Councillor Golovin. Golovina went up to Rasputin's flat and immediately came down again accompanied by the peasant woman, Laptinskaia; whereupon they all drove off to the Alexander-Nevski Convent."

"7th February. Vyubova came in a Court motor-car, and went off with Rasputin's secretary."

Not infrequently big parties in motor-cars drew up before the house in the Gorokhovaia to take Rasputin to a banquet at the Villa Rode, at Donon's or the gipsies', or in a private house. On these occasions Grigori generally came gaily through the hall with his boon companions, while the secret agents, silently pressed against the wall, carefully noted down the names of all those taking part in the outing.

As soon as the company had left the house the spies rushed to the door and signalled to the car stationed inconspicuously at the opposite corner of the street, the driver of which was in the service of the police. This taxi came along as if by chance towards the company as they strolled down the street, and nothing was more natural than for Rasputin and his friends to take the car which had come up so opportunely.

Meanwhile a second car had pulled up at number 64; a few detectives quickly sprang into it, and it proceeded to follow Rasputin's car at some distance. As soon as Rasputin and his friends alighted and entered a house, the agents usually succeeded in getting in touch quickly with the concierge of the building. In restaurants and other public places waiters or gipsies were sounded and induced by money and fair words to leave the room quietly from time to time, and give the spies an exact account of what was happening inside, who was with Rasputin, what was eaten and drunk, and the subjects of conversation.

Under date of December 14th we find this note:

"On the night of 13th to 14th December Rasputin, accompanied by the twenty-eight year old wife of the hereditary honor-

ary burgess, Yazininski, left 11 Fuhrstadt Street about 2 a. m., in a car for the restaurant 'Villa Rode' in Novaia Derevna. He was refused admittance on account of the lateness of the hour; but he began to hammer on the doors and wrenched the bell off. He gave five roubles to the police officer on guard, not to annoy him. Then he went off with his companion to the Mazalski gipsy choir at Number 49 and remained there till 10 a. m. The pair, in a very tipsy state, then proceeded to Madame Yazininskaia's flat, from which Rasputin did not return home till midday. In the evening he drove to Tsarskoe Selo."

"17th December. Princess Dolgorukaia's car came for Rasputin to-day, and he proceeded to a private room in the Hotel Astoria. There he was immediately joined by General Kleigels, former governor of St. Petersburg, with whom Rasputin remained till 6 a. m."

"20th December. Rasputin, accompanied by Ossipenko, the secretary of the Metropolitan Pitirim, visited the honorary burgess, Knirsche, in Sand Street; later a gipsy choir and two hampers of wine were sent for from the 'Villa Rode.' About 2 a. m. Rasputin could be seen through the window dancing."

"5th January. Rasputin, Ossipenko, Dunia, the maidservant, and Müller went off in droshkies to Müller's flat, taking a hamper of wine with them."

"13th January. To-day Rasputin, accompanied by Ivanitskaia, an unknown officer, and two ladies, visited the widow of State Councillor Mitinski, at 14 Ligovskaia. At 5 o'clock he left with the officer and Madame Ivanitskaia, and returned to his own flat. Ivanitskaia was somewhat merry, put on Rasputin's coat, and later left with the officer, still wearing it. Rasputin then went off in a car sent by Popermann to the Hotel Europe, where a drinking party was taking place. The guests present were Popermann, Kovariski, a law student, Tatishev, the director of the International Bank, and two unknown ladies."

"21st January. Rasputin went to visit Knirsche in Sand Street with Maria Gar, one of his followers, and then proceeded alone to 36 Basseina, the house of the actress Lerma, the mistress of the Secretary of the Council of Ministers, Manuilov. Besides

Manuilov, Stürmer, the Prime Minister, was also present."

"29th January. This evening Rasputin was with Filipov at the Restaurant Donon."

"11th March. At 10.15 we noticed Rasputin on the Gorokhovaia and followed him to the house of a prostitute, the converted Jewess Gregubova; from there he went on to a bathing establishment."

"21st March. Rasputin drove with Nikolai Glazov to the big Nord Hotel to the courtesan Eugenia Terekhova, where he stayed for two hours."

"15th April. Rasputin, with his friend, the Abbot Martian from Tiumen, called on the honorary burgess, Pestrikov, at 45 Ligovskaia. As Pestrikov was not at home, he took part in a drinking party which Pestrikov's son was giving to some students. A musician struck up, and there was singing and Rasputin danced with a maidservant."

Sometimes, when the strange doorkeepers proved inaccessible, the secret agents' zeal for duty went so far that they climbed up the houses in which Rasputin was visiting, and tried to peer through the windows. There they sometimes saw very curious and mysterious happenings which they were unable to explain, as, for example:

"14th May. Yesterday at 5 p. m. Rasputin went to the house of Belkovski and Tsesareva, at 15 Little Arl Street. About 10 o'clock it was observed that the windows of the flat were not lit up; but the agents of the secret service were able to note that one of the women passed through a brightly lighted room and then looked into a dark one, in which some men were sitting. Later we saw Rasputin, evidently scenting danger, rush out of the room, seize his hat and stick, and run down to the street. A few paces behind him came two men, and we heard one of them say: 'There he is running.' Then the two men returned to the house again. Rasputin sprang into a passing taxi and drove, standing up all the way, to the Liteni Prospekt, looking round all the time to see if he were being followed."

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The daily reports of the spies always close with a description of Rasputin's home-comings. When the chauffeur of the car that

*Seeing
Rasp
+ the
ex-Jewess
the sister
was
already
Jewess.*

set him down in the early hours of the morning before the door of the house in the Gorokhovaia had given his report, the detectives followed Rasputin up the stairs to the door of his flat, partly to help him in his intoxicated state, and partly to hear what he had to say. The pencils moved for the last time that day, and the home-coming of the holy man was described in the notebooks:

"14th October. Rasputin came home drunk at 1 a. m., insulted the concierge's wife, and reproached her with taking a bribe of twenty-five roubles from a minister. Then he remarked: 'He tried to bury me, but now I will bury him.'"

"6th November. Rasputin was at Popermann's, the merchant from Samara's flat, and came back drunk five hours later, kissing Popermann when he said good-bye. As he went up to his flat he inquired if there were any visitors for him. On hearing that there were two ladies he asked: 'Are they pretty? Very pretty? That's good. I need pretty ones.' About 7 o'clock he left the house, and gave the concierge's wife ten roubles; he seemed to be dead with sleep."

"14th November. Rasputin came home in an intoxicated state with Tatiana Shakhovskaia, but left again immediately with her, and did not come back again till about 2 a. m., very drunk."

"23rd November. Rasputin came home at 5 a. m. blind drunk."

"3rd December. Rasputin came home drunk at 3 a. m."

"7th December. Rasputin came home early about 7 o'clock; he was pretty drunk."

"12th December. Rasputin came back with Varvarova at 9.50 a.m.; he must have spent the night with her."

"2nd January. Rasputin came home drunk at 1 a. m."

"8th January. Rasputin came home from a visit to Nordmann, the Secretary of the Chancellery of the Order, about 3 a.m., accompanied by three ladies. The ladies stayed with him for two hours."

"14th January. Rasputin came home at 7 a.m.; he was dead drunk. He had Ossipenko and an unknown man with him. He smashed a pane of glass in the house door; apparently he had had one fall already, for his nose was swollen."

"18th January. Rasputin came home at 7.30 a.m. with two men and a woman; he was dead drunk, and sang songs on the public street. The unknown persons accompanied him up to his flat and then departed."

"22nd January. Rasputin returned at 5 a.m. with Ossipenko, an unknown man, and a woman; he was dead drunk."

"26th May. Rasputin came home in the motor-car of the merchant Mandel with the prostitute Gregubova. He was blind drunk, kissed Gregubova passionately, and stroked her cheeks. After she had gone he sent the concierge's wife for Katia, the sempstress, who lives in the same house, but she was not at home."

In the course of time great bundles of records of this kind piled up on the desks of the Okhrana, the police, and the ministries. Reports continued to pour in steadily about when Rasputin rose, who visited him, in whose company he left the house, in what condition he came home, and what had been observed on the short passage between the house door and the door of the flat, on the way to the baths, to church, or to some strange house.

Police headquarters then endeavoured, with these reports, to reconstruct the form of this rich, many-coloured, and contradictory life; but, since the mysterious figure of Grigori Efimovich inevitably remained incomprehensible, not only to the perspicacity of the spies, but also to the brains of their chiefs, a most curious silhouette, built up on minute but always futile observations, was thus created.

And yet, in spite of all its deficiencies, the picture, imperfect, distorted, and unreal, that emerges from the reports of the police agents, is the only authentic portrait of the starets in existence.

The collection of the police reports on Rasputin therefore became a great treasure, and was passed from hand to hand: ministers, grand dukes, princesses, foreign ambassadors, stock-brokers, and Court officials applied for it, and thought themselves lucky to be able to study these "staircase notes" for a day or two.

CHAPTER IX

FATHER GRIGORI RECEIVES

RASPUTIN usually got up at six o'clock in the morning and went straightway to early mass at Afonskoe Podvorie. He returned with a crowd of his followers, who accompanied him into the dining-room. There breakfast was ready and he drank tea with the wholemeal rusks of which he was particularly fond. In addition to these regular guests whom Rasputin brought back from morning service, petitioners of various kinds used to arrive about 8 o'clock.

The best time to find Rasputin was about ten o'clock in the morning. However boisterous the previous night might have been, and however urgent the visits he had to pay in the forenoon, he was nearly always in his flat at about ten o'clock, awaiting the daily call from Tsarskoe Selo.

If the telephone bell rang at this hour Dunia, the maid, a distant relative of the starets, at once hurried to the telephone, cried: "This is number 646/46," and asked rather crossly who was speaking; but, on hearing that it was Tsarskoe Selo, she answered in a much more polite and obliging tone that she would call Grigori Efimovich immediately. She then shouted through the door of Rasputin's business room: "Anna Alexandrovna on the telephone."

Rasputin hurried up and his brief replies could be heard: "What do you say? Why, what's the matter, my dear soul? I have people with me, but there! I will come."

His mood for the rest of the morning depended very largely on the nature of his conversation with Anna Vyrubova. Moreover, this "ten o'clock talk" was also an important moment for the guests waiting in the ante-room. Almost as soon as ten o'clock struck Colonel Komisarov, Prince Andronnikov, Rubinstein the banker, the confidential agent of Burdukov, the Master of the

Imperial Horse, and a whole crowd of politicians and wire-pullers were in the habit, one after another, of calling on the starets, all in the hope of catching some indiscreet reference to the conversation with Tsarskoe Selo.

These "ten o'clock visitors" usually stayed only a few minutes, just long enough to learn what they considered necessary; then they took leave, rushed down the stairs, and threw themselves into their cars, in order to give their various partners the quickest possible information about the subject of their conversation with Grigori Efimovich.

At the same hour the ante-room was already full of petitioners and visitors, who took their places on the little benches or gaily upholstered chairs. They waited patiently, often hours at a time, for an audience with the starets. Often the stream of visitors flowed into Rasputin's ante-room from 8 o'clock in the morning till late in the evening. There were days on which callers were so numerous that many had to wait on the staircase for their turn; on holidays the crowd was particularly large. Rasputin's daughter relates that on such days the whole street was often full of people. Cars and carriages stood everywhere, and visitors of the poorer classes flocked in long queues. On such days the other people living in the house counted several hundred visitors.

The universally known fact that Rasputin was in high favour at Court, and that, in consequence, he exercised great influence on the supreme dignitaries of Church and State, made him seem "all-powerful" in the eyes of numerous officials, officers, adventurers, brokers, and politicians, as well as of all who were at odds with the secular or clerical authorities. People told each other far and wide that Rasputin's sovereignty over Russia was more far-reaching than that of the Tsar himself, since only Rasputin was able to enforce his will. Many people gave him the title of "Tsar above the Tsars," to which, in accordance with the usage of the peasants, only very great and holy personages are entitled.

Not only did Rasputin enjoy the reputation of possessing unlimited power, he was also regarded as a holy man who had extraordinary mystic faculties. Wonderful tales were told of how the starets could look into every man's soul, foresee the future, and heal the sick by a glance of his eyes or a touch of his hands.

People said that they knew of many such cases, in which Rasputin, like Christ, had performed miracles. Not only did the peasants, men and women, who had followed the starets to the capital, firmly believe in his divinity; wide circles in St. Petersburg society had also become accustomed to regarding this clumsy, simple peasant from Pokrovskoe as the newly arisen Lord. For many mystically inclined people in St. Petersburg had turned to the doctrines of the Khlysty several decades earlier, and from time to time, with the greatest secrecy, quiet communities, the so-called "ships," of a purely sectarian character, had been formed in the most distinguished society of the capital. So the ground was well prepared for Rasputin's appearance as a new saviour. His fame had, of course, spread surreptitiously, for secrecy is one of the articles of faith of the Khlysty sect; but this mysteriousness had further enhanced the prestige and importance of the wonderful man. Men and women of all ages and classes, princesses as well as their maidservants, went to Father Grigori, and thrilled in expectation of the solemn moment when they would be allowed to kneel and beg for the blessing of God who had once again become man.

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With the same rapidity with which the report of Rasputin's divinity had spread, another secret also passed from mouth to mouth, till everyone interested knew of it, the secret that Rasputin was prepared to carry out various transactions, arrange releases from military service, get sentences of imprisonment quashed, or dispose of the granting of concessions; and the exact sum of money or the quality and price of the presents in return for which the help of the starets could be purchased was also known.

And, while it was being whispered in prosperous circles that Rasputin was open to bribes, the poorer classes quietly spread the consoling rumour that, although Grigori Efimovich did take presents for his services, he by no means made such gifts a necessary condition of his assistance. If, after submitting their petition, well-to-do peasants, rich widows, successful financiers, or persons anxious for ministerial rank put money on the table, Rasputin, without scruple or embarrassment, stuffed it into the wide pockets of his velvet breeches; but he was just as obliging,

kind, and ready to help if a petitioner came to him with empty hands and empty pockets. Perhaps he showed even more kindness and benevolence to the poor than to the rich; at any rate, the way in which he received their gifts seemed to prove that he set more store by a trifling gift from a poor man than by a great present from a wealthy one. When a successful speculator handed him over a sum of money, no matter how large, Grigori Efimovich hardly thanked him, and treated him with haughty arrogance, or even with marked insolence; on the other hand, he would accept with demonstrative pleasure the gifts of those simple people who, though often feeling the pinch of need, would show their gratitude to him by some trifle, a bottle of wine, a cheese, or an image of the Holy Mother of God. On such occasions he would frequently summon Dunia, his secretary Simanovich, or his daughter Matriona, and say to them: "Look what a splendid present this dear fellow has given me! Truly a noble giver!" Rasputin, with delicate natural tact, knew how to treat the poorest of the poor so that they left him feeling that their gifts had absolutely delighted the holy father.

But not only did the starets willingly use his influence on behalf of poor people without asking anything in return; he had also to receive every day a crowd of petitioners who expected gifts of money from him. This expectation was seldom disappointed. Grigori Efimovich gave readily, quickly, and generously, without requiring to be told a long and pitiful tale of misfortune. He had scarcely received a bundle of banknotes for negotiating a concession or securing a release from military service, and stuffed them carelessly in his pocket without counting them, than he pulled them out again and gave them to poor petitioners; a mother who wanted to visit a sick son in a distant province, but had not the necessary money, a father who was too poor to send his children to school, a sick person who needed money for the doctor. Not infrequently Rasputin, in the course of the day, gave away all the money he had got from his rich business friends in the morning—in contrast to those high dignitaries of the Empire who were wont to be indignant at Rasputin's venality, but themselves extorted money, without ever giving a kopek away again for disinterested objects.

The sums that flowed steadily into Rasputin's pockets were of course large enough to leave plenty over for himself, although his assistants and his business friends consistently robbed and deceived him. For, in spite of his peasant shrewdness, Grigori Efimovich was essentially a naïve and trusting person, and did not like to calculate. What was left from his daily incomings, after deduction for losses through theft and charity, he used for his own needs or put in the drawer of his writing table, where he was gradually accumulating a dowry for his daughter Matriona. The son of his friend Soloviev had asked for Matriona's hand, and the starets prided himself on making the best possible financial provision for the future of the young couple.

He himself could not manage money, and spent it as easily as he got it; he complained more than once that he had "hands like sieves." But, on the whole, he spent very little on himself and his family: his flat was simple, and furnished with no special luxury; he ate and drank profusely, it is true, but this was mostly covered by presents from friends, especially from his women adorers. His wife and children never gave up their simple peasant life, although they, too, frequently received gifts.

Under these circumstances the bundle of banknotes in the drawer of the writing table kept on growing, and Rasputin himself took a childish pleasure in this. With simple pride he used to show his visitors how his daughter's dowry was growing bigger and bigger; on the very night he met his death he remarked how pleased he was that his future son-in-law would not be disappointed in the dowry.

Besides the one class of suppliants who came to Rasputin with gold and gifts, and the other who came to receive them, there was still a third group of visitors. These were the women and girls who came to beg for the protection and advocacy of the starets to ensure the welfare, the career, or the business interests of someone closely connected with them, and who offered in return not gold, but their charming smiles, their glances which promised so much, and their moist lips. Every one of these women had heard that no gift, however costly, could dispose the starets to help so readily as feminine charm. If he liked the smile or the passionate and seductive pose of a suppliant who offered herself as a gift,

he always accepted this gift with joy and happiness, and spared no pains to carry out the wishes of his petitioners. In such cases he set in movement the highest authorities, ministers, and even the Tsar and Tsaritsa in person, although his protégée might be only a peasant or a simple servant girl.

But there were also women who called on Rasputin to ask him to do something, and who resisted his covetous glances, either because their love was already given to another man and they wished to keep themselves pure for him, or else because they found nothing attractive about this elderly, dirty peasant with his unkempt beard and his filthy finger-nails. Then Grigori Efimovich would give vent to his disappointment and wrath and sometimes be violent and rude; but he immediately became the good holy father again, and used all his influence and connections for these women too. For love, like every other gift, was very welcome to Rasputin, but it was not made a condition of his assistance.

Actually it seldom happened that such suppliants met Rasputin's advances with a refusal. Many of them even proudly boasted that the holy man had honoured them with his love. For at this time it was the supreme object of the desirous, but at the same time reverent, longing of many women and girls of all classes of society in St. Petersburg and the provinces to be admitted into the mysterious "holy of holies," as the starets' most intimate circle was called. On one occasion, when a novice refused to accede to Rasputin's desires, one of his most enthusiastic disciples, a married woman, asked her in amazement: "Why do you not want to belong to him? How can one refuse anything to a saint?"

The young lady replied indignantly: "Does a saint need sinful love? What sort of saintliness is that?"

"He makes everything that comes near him holy," was the reply of his disciple.

"And would you be ready to accede to his desires?"

"Of course. I have already belonged to him, and I am proud and happy to have done so."

"But you are married! What does your husband say to it?"

"He considers it a very great honour. If Rasputin desires a

woman we all think it a blessing and a distinction, our husbands as well as ourselves."

Women found in Grigori Efimovich the fulfilment of two desires which had hitherto seemed irreconcilable, religious salvation and the satisfaction of carnal appetites. The old Orthodox priest of their parish had promised them the fulfilment of their yearning for purity and spiritual peace, on condition that they led a stainless, pure, and virtuous life here below; but this demand was in terrible antagonism with the desires of their sinful bodies and ardent lips. The way to God required renunciation of sensual joy; the way of sensual joy, on the other hand, led away from God.

Then Father Grigori appeared, and to all the women, tormented by the painful dissension between soul and body, preached his new doctrine that sin was not the way to damnation, but rather the quickest and surest way to salvation; and the discord between soul and body, between religious and sensual release, was thus resolved. As in the eyes of his disciples Rasputin was a reincarnation of the Lord, intercourse with him, in particular, could not possibly be a sin; and these women found for the first time in their lives a pure happiness, untroubled by the gnawings of conscience, in the arms of Rasputin, the "holy satyr."

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Many of Rasputin's women petitioners showed by their hesitating manner, as soon as they came in, and their shy, nervous attitude as they waited, that this was their first appearance, while others entered with the unembarrassed assurance of daily visitors. The very way in which the maid received them made this division into groups quite clear. Only those women visitors whom Dunia knew the starets would admit to his private rooms, were permitted to take off their coats in the ante-room. Anyone who had crossed the threshold of the dining-room or the bedroom was, in Dunia's eyes, a member of Grigori Efimovich's intimate circle, and, as such, enjoyed various little privileges; their outdoor clothes, for example, had a regular place reserved for them on the pegs.

The members of the "most intimate circle" did not have to

pass through the general waiting-room at all when they called on Rasputin. They could come and go by the back staircase, the way to which led through the narrow little kitchen, which was always blocked up with boxes and hampers. Those waiting in the ante-room only caught sight of these disciples when one of them came out of one door and disappeared through another, or when one stopped a moment in the ante-room to look for somebody.

These mysterious appearances of Rasputin's most intimate female followers afforded the other women, as they waited in the ante-room, food for all sorts of wonderful imaginings. To them, the women who enjoyed the exalted right of admittance to the "Holy of Holies" were beings set apart, and the strangest stories were whispered about them.

Chief of them was the faithful, indefatigable servant of Rasputin, the nun, Akulina Nikichkina, a quiet, amiable woman in the garb of a nursing sister. She was of robust, somewhat coarse build, had simple, peasant features which were, however, almost beautiful in their homely regularity, and a clear, intelligent, and steady gaze. Among Rasputin's immediate circle she was known as "the holy one" on account of her serenity, in which not the slightest trace of passion remained. If she came out of the inner rooms for a moment the conversation of the gossiping women in the ante-room was silenced, and all looked at her in reverent amazement. For it was well known that, of all Rasputin's followers, she was most faithfully devoted to him, had followed him everywhere, and blindly obeyed all his wishes. Nothing, not even the increasingly dissolute life of the starets, could shake her faith in him and his divinity.

Akulina had led a peaceful life of contemplation with her fellow nuns in the convent of Saint Tikhon in Okhtoi, deep in the forests of the Urals, until, shortly after she had taken her vows, she was attacked by a strange and terrible disease. During her fervent prayers before the image of the Saviour in her cell she had become subject to a feverish ecstasy followed by severe convulsions, and these attacks occurred at ever shorter intervals. Soon the other nuns when they met whispered to each other with

trembling horror the sad certainty that the devil had entered into poor Sister Akulina.

One evening, just as Akulina, after praying before the image of the Saviour, had again fallen into convulsions and tremors, a strange pilgrim knocked at the gate of the convent. Grigori Efimovich, then a wanderer in the Urals, entered and asked for a night's lodging. As soon as he heard the wild shrieking of the nun and learned from the other sisters that Akulina was possessed by the devil, he asked to be taken to her cell, and remained there alone with her for a considerable time, in an endeavour to drive the Evil One out of her by special prayers and spiritual exercises.

When, with pale face and shining eyes, he left the cell again, he was able to tell the anxiously waiting nuns that God had aided him in his struggle, and allowed him to banish Satan for ever from Akulina's body. Soon after the young nun also came out of the cell, released and well again, her eyes beaming with happiness.

This, the first miracle wrought by the saintly Father Grigori, the re-arisen saviour from Pokrovskoe, was reverently noted in the annals of the Okhtoi convent; and Sister Akulina, with the consent of her Superior, devoted herself for the rest of her existence to the one august task of consecrating her life to the man who had saved her, and spreading the fame of his holiness throughout the world.

All the visitors knew the nun and almost all loved her, for she not infrequently received petitions and did various errands for the starets. Her pretty soprano voice was often heard singing the song "Strannik" at the common table of the women disciples, with Rasputin's pleasant voice in accompaniment. Her singing was sympathetic but melancholy, especially when, at the end of the folksong, she began to sing hymns.

Another lady in the circle was Olga Vladimirovna Lokhtina, the wife of State Councillor Lokhtin. She had had a terrible adventure with the truculent monk Iliodor, who tried to seduce her when she was visiting the monastery at Tsarytsin, and, failing in his design, declared to his numerous admirers that an evil spirit

had entered into Madame Lokhtina. The overwrought disciples of Ilidor rushed at the poor woman, tore the clothes off her back, and bound her feet to a cart, which immediately went off at a gallop. Some peasants hastened up and released her at the last moment; but she suffered a severe nervous shock, which led to mental derangement.

She made Rasputin's acquaintance through old Madame Golovina, and he tried to cure her, and, for a time, seemed to have succeeded. But soon her madness took another form, religious worship of the starets himself. If she met Grigori Efimovich she fell on her knees before him, and proclaimed him her Christ and Saviour. She was imbued with the belief that Rasputin was the reincarnate God, and tried to convince everybody that his every touch was sanctifying. Moreover, she boasted that she had shared Rasputin's love, and told everyone of her happiness: "What a saint does is holy, what he touches is blessed, what he loves attains the holiness of Heaven. Believe me, my sisters, the body of anyone who surrenders herself to this God becomes itself divine by contact with him."

She would often cross her hands and bow her head and, if anyone talked loudly, she looked at her in displeasure and said: "In Father Rasputin's house it is as if one were in Church. Peace must reign here."

Olga Vladimirovna had been a faithful child of the Orthodox Church; but, in consequence of her fanatical worship of Rasputin, the priesthood had damned her as a heretic and an apostate. But all the wrongs she had to suffer for her faith in Father Grigori could not shake her confidence in the slightest. She revered him as divine, and herself led the life of a martyr, sleeping on bare boards with a block of wood for a pillow.

An elderly lady accompanied by a charming young girl was also frequently to be seen in Rasputin's waiting-room: in the dim eyes of the mother, as in the daughter's dreamy gaze, lay an expression of heartfelt, absolute devotion. Madame Golovina, the widow of State Councillor Golovin, like her simply dressed, fair-haired daughter Maria, was one of Rasputin's closest and most devoted followers. They were relations of Anna Vyrubova, and Munia, the pet name of the daughter, was the avowed fa-

avourite of the starets. She had idolized a young aristocrat and, when he died, had fallen into a state of melancholy. A chance meeting with Grigori Efimovich convinced the young girl that this man had been sent by God to comfort her, and from that time forward she devoted her whole life to his service and soon fell entirely under his influence. Whenever she saw him her whole body began to tremble, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes glittered strangely. The mother shared this boundless faith in the holiness of Rasputin, and nearly always accompanied her daughter to his house.

Another frequent visitor was the wife of a colonel, an opera singer with a beautiful voice. Her husband knew of her relations with the starets, but made no objection, being convinced that intercourse with the holy man could only be of benefit to his wife. The singer often rang up Rasputin, and sang him one of his favourite songs through the telephone. On such an occasion Grigori called his women friends together, let them listen in turns, and asked the singer to sing the gipsy ballad "Troika" or the song "Barinia." Sometimes he even danced holding the ear-piece.

Scene

Among the women of Rasputin's regular circle, besides those whom he had cured of sickness or comforted in some deep grief, were also to be found others who were devoured by restless sensual passion, and who sought release from their sinful lusts. Had not Grigori Efimovich overcome sin through the "mysterious death" and reached the "supreme passionlessness of a saint"? He himself had frequently said to his disciples: "God has granted me freedom from passion; I touch a woman, and it is as if I touched a bit of wood. I have no desires, and the spirit of passionless calm passes from me to the women with me, so that they, too, become pure and holy."

*D. T.
How he
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To these followers of Rasputin belonged particularly a tall young girl called Masha, wearing the uniform of a high-school pupil, who attracted general attention as she passed through the waiting-room on account of her unusual bearing and her strange, repulsive face. It was angular and almost as white as chalk, with a blunt chin like an animal's, a low, protruding forehead, and grey, sullen eyes. She wore her dull, colourless hair coiled in heavy ringlets, and a tuft was always falling over her eyes, caus-

ing her to shake her head impatiently: with an almost animal movement of her pointed tongue she would lick the thick, bright red lips of her half-opened mouth, and then disappear, yawning widely, through the nearest door. Vishniakova, the nurse of the Tsesarevich, was a more sympathetic figure; she was also one of Rasputin's intimate friends, and had submitted herself to the starets in the conviction that by so doing she would drive the devil of sensuality from her body. The same impulse moved two society ladies, Princess Dolgorukaia and Princess Shakhovskaia, the latter a woman with magnificent dark eyes, in the uniform of a sister of charity; both had left their homes and children for the sake of Rasputin.

Even Rasputin's own family, his wife and daughters, were convinced of his power to banish the devil of sensual desire. Praskovia Fedorovna bore her husband's infidelities calmly, patiently, and unreproachfully, for in her simple mind Grigori Efimovich had been entrusted by God with a higher mission, and his debaucheries, therefore, served a holy purpose. She felt profound reverence for him, and served him like a faithful and devoted servant. His two daughters, Matriona and Varia, were also united to their father by reverence and admiration, and firmly believed in his divine mission. Matriona, the elder, in particular, zealously spread the fame of the starets, and very often took part in the meetings of the women in Rasputin's dining-room. In her diary may be found notes belonging to a later period which show her belief in, and love for, her father.

"For the first time," she writes, in 1918, "I again felt the near presence of my dear father, who has been dead for over a year now. We can no longer hear his words from his own mouth, but we feel distinctly that he is with us. I myself have seen him in a dream, and Olga Vladimirovna Lokhtina has similar visions. Yesterday she was talking of my father's teaching, and it was as if his own spirit were speaking from her mouth. Since then I love Olga Vladimirovna more than ever; she told me that she had been in the Gorokhovaia in St. Petersburg, visited the courtyard of my father's house, and felt his spirit living in her."

Besides his two daughters, Rasputin also possessed a son, Mitia; he was a somewhat childish lad, who laughed continually

in a strange way, and blinked at everybody. Otherwise he was good-natured and infinitely attached to his father, who was also very fond of him just for his very deficiencies. The starets succeeded, during the war, in getting his son the post of orderly on the Empress's hospital train, thus removing him from the dangers of serving in the lines.

As a consequence of the great reverence in which Rasputin was held by his family, a cordial feeling of patriarchal harmony had long existed between him and them. They recognized but one task, to care for him and make his life as pleasant as possible, while he, too, was tenderly anxious about their welfare. Regard for his family was not the least of the motives that induced him to accept bribes and presents on every hand; if he was invited to a banquet he always came home with his pockets full, and presented his wife and daughters with all sorts of dainties, which afforded him particular pleasure.

Thus Rasputin was surrounded by a ring of people who did everything to serve and protect him, and, as far as possible, to relieve him of the cares and responsibilities of everyday life. At the same time his women disciples, distinguished princesses and Court ladies as well as simple peasant women, and the members of his family were also his zealous apostles who never tired of proclaiming his saintliness.

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Rasputin, when not calling at Tsarskoe Selo or on the most powerful people in the Empire in St. Petersburg, or when not negotiating with financiers in his business room, spent most of his time among his women disciples in the big dining-room.

Whenever he returned home his first steps always took him into this "Holy of Holies," where the women were already impatiently awaiting him. They gathered there for the whole day, sitting round the great flower-decked, richly spread table, talking about their wonderful experiences with Grigori Efimovich, and trying to interpret the hidden meaning of his sayings.

Even if he had been away for only half an hour, the same scene of enthusiastic welcome was invariably enacted when the door opened and he rejoined them; the women jumped up from their seats, hurried up to their "holy father," surrounded him,

and caressed him, until he raised his right hand, palm outward, to his forehead, blessed each one of them, and pressed a fatherly kiss on her hair. They swooned with happiness and, overpowered by his blessing, staggered back to their chairs round the table.

Grigori Efimovich would then sink comfortably into the place reserved for him, reach out to the piled-up eatables, and, in the intervals, talk unctuously of God and salvation. His admirers were accustomed to his habit of suddenly jumping from edifying subjects to the latest naughty story from Prince Andronnikov's store. Munching contentedly, he would favour them with the gossip of high society in St. Petersburg, chat about that old imbecile Protopopov's relations with a nurse, tell them the latest news from headquarters, and suddenly plunge into the high political secrets of Tsarskoe Selo. Often the face of a boy would appear at the door, laughing queerly and winking at the assembly. If a new member of the circle took fright, and asked who it was, Rasputin replied good-humouredly: "That is my son Mitia. He is not quite all there. He thinks everything a joke and laughs all day long."

scene

While the starets chatted on every conceivable subject, told funny stories, and, in the intervals, ate and drank steadily, he would call one or another of his disciples, take her head in his lap, tease and caress her, and then suddenly begin preaching again in an unctuous tone.

The enraptured women at this curious Round Table reached out when he reached out, ate when he ate, and sipped their wine whenever he raised a brimming glass to his mouth. They listened with the same reverence to his talk of God and the way of salvation, and to the often extremely coarse stories told him by Andronnikov. To the members of the Round Table both his sermons on redemption and his gossip about the Court were equally manifestations of a sublime and blessed spirit.

*more
story
anaphora*

The persons assembled in the waiting-room could only guess at what was happening in the "Holy of Holies" from the sounds that penetrated to them occasionally or from a fleeting glimpse through the door. But to the women who waited there, yearning for the appearance of the starets, the time did not seem long. They listened reverently to the noises from the adjoining room, and

tried to discover what the holy man was talking about, what he was doing, and what sort of mood he was in. One or two of them had already, in a lucky hour, been admitted to the "Holy of Holies," and they related their experiences to the others. Sometimes, too, Dunia appeared in the ante-room, and had to give a detailed account of what was happening in the inner rooms. For although she played the part of servant in the ante-room, and helped the guests off with their furs, Dunia was held in great honour and regard by the women disciples. When she came in the ladies leapt from their chairs, offered her their seats, and were eager to be allowed to relieve her of her household work. So Dunia was able to listen to the talk of the starets at her leisure, and then go out, and, as a consolation and comfort to the crowd for their long, passive waiting, communicate to them one or another of Rasputin's utterances; for example, how the starets, as he was eating fish and cheese, had said to his disciples: "You believe that I pollute you; I do not pollute you, I rather purify you." Or else how he had emptied a glass of Madeira, taken a girl on his knees and softly stroked her hair, while he talked of the chastening power of contrition: "Only by humble repentance can we attain to redemption! Man must sin in order that he may have something to repent of. If God sends us a temptation, we must yield to it voluntarily and without resistance, so then we may afterwards do penance in utter contrition."

Then he let his head fall reflectively on the shoulder of the favoured pupil, and closed his eyes, only to raise himself again and begin to speak once more: "The first word of the Saviour was 'Repent.' How can we repent if we have not first sinned?"

Then Father Grigori had risen from his seat and gone into the adjoining business room, where the representative of Rubinstein, the banker, was waiting to see him on important business. His words had made a great impression on his faithful women worshippers; they sat round the table with heads bowed, absorbed in profound reflection.

On another occasion Rasputin, who had come straight home from a banquet, sat for some time in melancholy silence, and, at last, in a queerly changed voice, which had something distant and detached about it, declared that he had only five more years

to spend among his faithful followers; after that he must leave them all, even his family, and retire into the deepest isolation. The disciples listened to this speech of their master, and they all felt very sad. They sat round the table, as if rapt, with white, troubled faces, until the countenance of the starets cleared, and his mouth again twitched in the slight smile they loved so much. He reached for the fish and the wine, and the women went on eating and drinking as before.

It was always a very happy moment for the waiting crowd in the ante-room when one of those living in the house opened the door of the "Holy of Holies" for a moment, and afforded them a glimpse into the mysterious room. They could at least see a small part of what was going on in the dining-room, and hear the voices of the disciples and even the talk of the starets himself, as he preached, told stories, or asked for wine. They stared through the door with curious eyes, and tried to take in as much of the picture as they could, one end of the great sideboard against the wall, a bit of the bronze lamp with its great glass shade, and under it the middle of the richly decked table with its load of food, on which they divined rather than saw baskets full of flowers, wine bottles, plates of fried fish, glasses of preserves, and tea. Near the window was a rocking-chair, and behind the table the clothes of some visitors could be discerned against the high back of the oak chair; in occasional lucky moments the starets himself could be glimpsed, or at least a bit of him, a sleeve, the hem of his kaftan, the toe of a boot, or his big hand swinging out in a broad gesture.

Unimportant though all this may have been, it was enough to send the excited and greedy imaginations of the waiting crowd on far flights. For long after the door was shut again everything that they had seen and heard was passionately discussed.

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But discussion died before the excitement when the strong grip of Rasputin's hand pressed heavily on the handle, the door opened wide, and the powerful and patriarchal figure of the starets appeared in the doorway. The monotonous murmuring became silent, giving way to the clatter of chairs pushed back, and the rustling of people rising from their seats. The fine ladies

put their hands quickly to their hats to tidy stray locks of hair, the peasant women pulled at their kerchiefs; the Government officials jumped up and smoothed down their frock coats; the leaders of peasant deputations unfolded their crackling petitions; the officers instinctively assumed a rigid attitude and rattled their spurs; the representatives of the banks opened their portfolios, and took out various documents; the messengers and servants held their letters ready in their outstretched hands. Women pushed through the crowd, fell on their knees before Rasputin, and crossed themselves again and again.

The starets stood motionless for a few seconds in the middle of the room. His rumpled clothes were witness of the fact that a girl had just been sitting on his knee; his lips were still moist with wine and kisses; his eyes had a strange, joyful light in them, and happy dimples played about his mouth.

A moment later these last traces of the banquet disappeared, and the waiting crowd saw before them Father Grigori, the all-powerful miracle-worker, the pious man of God. His lean frame was firmly planted in the heavy, high peasant boots, and he inspected all present, one by one, with a stern glance. The representative of Manus, the banker, had an urgent message to deliver and thought himself entitled to push up to the starets. But Rasputin turned from him with a haughty movement towards two girls in sailor suits, hardly more than children, who stood curtseying and crossing themselves shyly. Their cheeks had a dark flush as they made their petition in thin, childish voices; Grigori Efimovich bent down to them kindly.

"Well, well, my doves," he growled, when he understood what they wanted, "you need help in your education? Have you no one who could assist you—scarcely enough to eat—well, wait, just wait a moment."

Troubled and thoughtful, he gazed in front of him for a moment, gave the girl some rouble notes, and then called to Dunia to bring him writing materials. But suddenly he became impatient and turned to the bystanders, saying: "Have none of you a pen and a sheet of paper?"

Manus's representative seized the opportunity to get near him again, and offered him his receipt book and a pen. Then he tried

once again in a rapid rush of words to give the great man his message. But the starets again ignored him, took the receipt book, turned his back on the messenger, and began to trace a name and address in clumsy characters on the back of a form: "Vladimir Nikolaevich Voeikov, Tsarskoe Selo." Beneath this he scratched a cross, and under that, the letters "Kh.V.", the sign for "Christ is risen," and then, with many pauses and breaks, wrote the following: "My dear and valued friend, do it for me. Grigori." He carefully folded the note, handed it to the two sisters, made the sign of the cross over their girlishly parted hair, gave them his hand to kiss, and then turned to an old careworn-looking peasant.

The peasant began to explain at length that he had come from the Saratov Government at the request of a peasant, Gavril Shishkin by name, and begged the venerable Father Grigori Efimovich to use his influence with the Tsar in order to secure a pardon for Shishkin, who had been condemned to a term of imprisonment for fraud. Whereupon the old man untied the girdle of his shirt, drew from next his skin a large sheet of newspaper, unfolded it carefully, and took out two hundred and fifty roubles in notes. After a brief statement that Gavril Shishkin would be very happy if the starets would accept this sum as a sign of his gratitude, the peasant handed the bundle of notes along with the petition to Rasputin who, after a rapid glance at them, slipped both into his trousers pocket.

"Go home in peace," said the starets kindly, "and tell Gavril Shishkin that I will discuss his case with little Papa." Then he made the sign of the cross over the peasant, blessed him, and turned to Eugenia Terekhova, a society lady, who advanced with an ingratiating smile.

She, too, held in her gloved hands a beautifully written petition, asking that she be granted a contract for underclothing for the Ministry of War.

"*You* will do me this favour, won't *you*, Father Grigori?" she remarked roguishly.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I will do it." He stroked her breast, and smiled at her, while she kissed his hands, offered her beautiful

brow for him to make the sign of the cross on, and took her leave with a radiant and triumphant look.

An officer in uniform, bald, with a gold pince-nez on his nose, stepped forward and announced himself as Sub-Lieutenant Maksakov; but before he had a chance of making his request, a civilian pushed him aside. The latter was shabbily dressed, and kept on turning a very worn and greasy hat in his hands; he interrupted the bald-headed officer, and began at once, in an excited voice and a mass of confused verbiage, to put an extremely complicated case to the starets. Occasionally he seemed to lose the thread completely and began the whole story over again. Finally only one fact emerged clearly from his talk, that he, a teacher in a village school, had been the victim of a grave injustice at the hands of his director, and that he wished Rasputin to give him a letter of introduction to the Minister of Education.

Grigori Efimovich wrinkled his brow and replied in a vexed tone: "I don't hold with this education! But there, for my part, very good, I will write the letter of introduction for *you*. Just wait a moment. . . ."

He turned to the bald-headed officer; he, however, asked for a private interview.

Rasputin threw a rapid glance towards the corner, where a pretty brunette, her eyes red with weeping, was leaning timidly against the wall; begged the officer to have patience for a moment, and turned to the strange lady.

She held a letter of introduction from a Moscow friend of Rasputin in her shaking hands, which were covered with common thread gloves; this letter stated that her name was Maria Alexeevna, and begged Grigori Efimovich to assist her in getting her husband's sentence of administrative banishment repealed.

The starets put a few friendly questions to the lady, took her hand in his, stroked it in a fatherly way, and said in a soothing tone that he would be able to arrange everything. Then he asked her to wait in the little room until he had disposed of all the other petitioners. He himself conducted her to the door of the room, opened it, and ushered her in. He came back immediately

to the waiting-room and talked apart with the officer in a low voice. At this moment a messenger appeared with a magnificent basket of roses and a dozen silk shirts of various colours. Rasputin called Dunia and bade her take these gifts, a present from a lady of high degree, and put them away carefully.

At this point a man called Dolina pushed up to the starets and submitted to him a request that he use his influence to have Russian citizenship granted to a German merchant, who would show his gratitude liberally for the service. Rasputin gave a little nod of assent, and immediately bent down to an old woman in a coarse skin coat and a round hat, who complained that she was the widow of a poor official, was quite destitute, and did not know what to do. The starets at once put his hand in his wide trousers pocket, drew out the newspaper containing the two hundred and fifty roubles he had just received from the peasant Shishkin, and handed the whole bundle to the woman with a careless gesture. Then he made the sign of the cross over her and went on with his business.

But innumerable hands, seeking gifts, were stretched out towards him from all sides, the bony, rough hands of old men, little children's hands, toil-worn hands belonging to women workers and maidservants, the white, well-cared-for hands of beautiful women that told of better days.

Grigori Efimovich looked at these hands, and his gaze wandered up the arms of each in turn till it reached the eyes, in which he could read the misery of poverty, despairing entreaty, and little, timid hopes. His hand went again to his pocket, and searched distractedly for money in it; when he was sure that he had no more on him he whispered something to Dunia, who hurriedly disappeared behind the door of the study. A young man appeared at once with a sheaf of banknotes; Rasputin took the money from his hand and went from one petitioner to another, distributing considerable sums among them; then he made the sign of the cross over them and dismissed them.

Two men next addressed the starets, one of whom he had known for a long time: he was a certain Pogan, an agent, who lived on small commissions. Pogan introduced his companion as Mendel Neumann, an engineer, who desired a reprieve from

his Majesty the Emperor from a sentence of eight months' imprisonment for a military offence. After a brief discussion in low tones of the material terms of Rasputin's intervention, he declared that he was willing to bring Mendel Neumann's petition personally to the notice of the Tsar.

At this moment the outer door opened and a tall, slim girl with beautiful dreamy eyes came in. When she saw the starets she flew up to him and kissed his hand. Some of the women present recognized the new visitor, and whispered excitedly to each other that she was the daughter of a grand duke. Rasputin greeted the beautiful newcomer with obvious pleasure, and clasped her in his arms, while she began to chatter gaily, telling him how well she had been since he had taught her to see the world with other eyes. "I have always said to *you*," remarked the starets in a dignified and cordial tone, "that everything depends on the way *you* look at the world. *You* have only to put faith in my words, and all will be well."

Meanwhile a little elderly man with sparse grey hair popped up and introduced himself as an attendant at one of the bathing establishments that Rasputin often frequented. Grigori Efimovich received the bath attendant very kindly, clapped him benevolently on the shoulder, and went straight off to the study to settle the business. A few minutes later, with a few friendly words, he handed him a letter of recommendation to the Prefect, which ran: "My dearest friend, please excuse me. Help the poor bath attendant. Grigori."

The women disciples belonging to the intimate circle had been looking on with interest at all these happenings from the door of the dining-room. They were heartily sorry for their holy starets, thus spending himself self-sacrificingly for the good of the people, and sparing himself no effort. Sometimes it actually happened that this endless business was too much for Rasputin's strength; he had to run into the dining-room for a few minutes, throw himself into a chair, and, wiping the sweat from his brow, complain how fatiguing this rush was. Then one of his disciples usually went anxiously up to him, kissed him, and expressed her willingness to deal with the petitioners for a while.

Meanwhile, the telephone rang almost unceasingly. Rasputin's niece was in charge of it; she made notes, answered questions, and sometimes called Sister Akulina, Anna Vyrubova, or Rasputin himself to the instrument. And the bell of the flat kept ringing, and new visitors and fresh messengers with presents continued to appear.

But again Grigori Efimovich took his place among the suplicants and listened to their complaints until Dunia came up to him and reminded him of Maria Alexeevna, the pretty woman waiting in the little room, whom he seemed to have forgotten completely in the rush of business. Smiling happily and slyly, he hurried into the little room to promise the poor woman his help in releasing her husband from Siberia.

* * * * *

Hardly had the starets left the ante-room than the solemn hush among the waiting crowds ceased, and the former noisy confusion of talk began again—chiefly about the little room where Grigori Efimovich was closeted with the shy Maria Alexeevna. All sorts of curious legends were afloat about the purpose of this room and what went on there. The women put their heads together and whispered to each other; many of them had a peculiar smile on their lips. They knew the secrets of the little room from their own experience on previous occasions, and could imagine what was happening to pretty, timid Maria Alexeevna at that moment. They recalled the day on which they had first found themselves alone there with the starets; and they discussed excitedly the modest furniture, the iron camp-bed with its fox-skin cover, a gift from Anna Vyrubova, the ikons adorned with ribbons and the lamps burning before them, the pictures of the Tsar and Tsaritsa, and the scriptural texts on the walls.

When Rasputin was closeted with a woman in his little room, no one, not even one of his intimates, was allowed to enter; only if a telephone call came from Tsarskoe Selo was Dunia permitted to knock softly at the door. For in this little room took place the "initiation" of the novices into the new doctrine of "redemption from sin," and here it was decided which of the women was to become a permanent member of the circle of "intimates."

Many a young girl had left this mysterious room with a happy, radiant face; but there were also many women who rushed out suddenly, with their dress disarranged and crumpled, weeping and deeply insulted, or trembling with fury, and raging and shrieking so that they had to be removed with the assistance of the detectives lurking on the staircase. Not every petitioner was able to understand and value properly the "holy rite of redemption through sin"; in many of them the "devil of pride" was too strong to let them take the "way of humiliation."

It had even happened that agitated women had gone to the police and complained that Rasputin had raped them. In such cases the Chief of Police, Beletski, would have a record made and copies sent to all official departments interested, and also to some privileged private persons. Those who received a record of this kind read it with a quiet smirk, and thought of that "damned holy man," Grigori Efimovich, with a mixture of comfortable prurience and sincere envy. Quite clearly, no one seriously thought of taking legal proceedings against the all-powerful starets on account of accusations of this kind.

All this was well known to the women who daily assembled in Rasputin's waiting-room. So, when a little later the timid Maria Alexeevna emerged from the little room looking more sad and frightened than before, many eyes examined her intently, in order to guess her fate from her appearance. A few minutes afterwards the starets also appeared in the ante-room again; his hair, untidy and rumpled, clung to his temples and, breathing heavily, he went up to a group of three peasants and received their complaints about the inhuman conduct of an estate-owner. Two nuns from Verkhoture begged and received his blessing; a stout gentleman, a banker from Kiev, accompanied by his servant, asked for a private interview; the messenger of Baron Ginsburg handed over a considerable sum of money, and got a receipt for it; the sculptor, Aronson, who was working on a bust of Rasputin, discussed his next sitting; and so Grigori Efimovich resumed the business of giving audience.

~~Then two very pretty ladies came in, both wearing elegant fur coats, one dark, the other fair with blue eyes. They were friends, and had arrived from Moscow about a week before,~~

to claim the starets' assistance in their affairs. At their entry Rasputin's women housemates and disciples became agitated and hostile. For days the mysterious attitude of these two strangers had made them furious, because these pretty women, by their "devilish resistance," had occasionally upset the holy father completely. The poor starets had drunk and raved for nights together in order to forget the annoyance and vexation these "haughty devils" had caused him.

Sister Akulina, in particular, was in a boiling rage against these Moscow women who were abusing Rasputin's feelings in this frivolous way. Once, when the starets had remained out the whole night immediately after the arrival of the two ladies, Akulina next morning asked Lenchka Dianumova, one of them, whether he had spent the night with her; but Lenchka had furiously denied it. The idea that women existed who could refuse themselves to the holy father, outraged the disciples, especially Sister Akulina, as Rasputin obviously set great store by the attachment of these two ladies. In wonder, disgust, mockery, and contempt, Rasputin's women worshippers told each other that Lenchka Dianumova had visited the starets in Moscow to save her German mother from the threat of banishment from Kiev, and that he had immediately become passionately interested in her. At their first meeting he gave her the pet name of "Frantik" (Fop), and kissed her and, after he left Moscow, had sent her several affectionate telegrams.

Soon after this Lenchka appeared in St. Petersburg and had made the starets angry on her first visit by expressing a wish to bring a male acquaintance of her friend to the flat. Rasputin thought that Frantik had come from Moscow accompanied by a lover, whom she now wished to introduce to him.

"*You* are a fine one!" he shrieked in a fury. "*You* have brought your swain from Moscow with *you*. *You* could not bear to be parted from him! *You* come to beg me a favour and bring your swain with *you*! I will do nothing for you, you can go! I have enough women to love and fondle me in St. Petersburg. I do not need you."

Then he ran to the telephone and began to speak in a voice shaking with excitement: "Darling, are *you* free? I am coming

to you. You are pleased? Yes? I'll be with you immediately."

He hung up the receiver, looked triumphantly at his two prudish visitors, and remarked angrily: "You see, I need no Moscow ladies. I like the St. Petersburg ones better!"

Nevertheless, next morning he rang up Lenchka Dianumova in the most friendly fashion, begged her pardon, and asked her to come and see him again very soon. Since then Frantik had been a frequent guest in the Gorokhovaia, and had brought with her her friend Lella, who needed Rasputin's help in a complicated family lawsuit. He had received the two ladies most amiably, and had asked both of them separately to come into his little room; but they had always contrived skilfully to evade his wishes.

The disciples got more and more nervous, feeling that the society of these haughty Moscow women could only bring the starets annoyance and disappointment. One or two of them had tried several times to warn him, and cure him of his strange passion; but he had vigorously forbidden any interference, and had once even refused an invitation to Tsarskoe Selo for the sake of these lovely ladies.

The two friends managed in a masterly style, by means of half-concessions, to hold out hopes and to put off the starets, without ever satisfying his real desires. Obviously, their aim was to secure his support but to refuse him the *quid pro quo*. Grigori Efimovich became more and more energetic, and had even sought out these "women possessed by the devil of pride" at night in their hotel. But in vain did he preach to them of human love and its blessing, and tell them that without love the soul is dark and God turns the light of his countenance from men; love is the commandment of the Lord, and must be obeyed like the other commandments, in order to avoid falling into the power of the devil.

Days and nights passed in this way, and still Rasputin did not succeed in reaching his goal. He paced up and down the dining-room in agitation, his eyes were angry, his face seemed distorted; he drank wine and carried on like a wild beast. When all his usual means of bending women to his will had failed, he finally called on Lenchka at one A. M., accompanied by the

scene

Minister whose assistance she required. "Open the door, darling," he cried, "I have brought the Minister with me, and we can settle the whole business in a few minutes."

But the diabolical obstinacy of the Moscow ladies went to such lengths that they kept their door locked against Grigori Efimovich and the Minister, so that both had to retire with their purpose unaccomplished. To deaden his disappointment, the starets with his high-placed companion proceeded to a dance club, spent the night in the company of the gipsy girls, and did not get home till ten next morning, in time for the telephone conversation with Tsarskoe Selo.

That day, as he stood in the waiting-room dealing with the various suppliants, heavy-headed, weary after his night's debauch, and in a bad temper, the two Moscow ladies came in, gay and unembarrassed as if nothing had happened. The starets was seized by a fit of unbridled fury and excitement. He led the ladies through the ante-room to his little room, rushed into the dining-room, and came back at once with a bottle of wine in his hand. He was very pale and a dark fire burned in his eyes. Some of the disciples had hurried up to Lenchka and Lella, and almost implored them to abandon their resistance, and not to torment the holy father any longer. Rasputin poured the wine into tea-glasses and ordered all the company to drink. "I love these ladies from Moscow," he cried. "I love them, although they torment me. For their sakes I boozed all last night, for they have set my heart aflame!"

He returned to the ante-room, and found there two clerics with great golden crosses on their breasts. He addressed them à propos of nothing, and told them he had been gadding about all night. "I was with a beautiful gipsy girl, who kept singing the song 'I am going to my love.' What say *you* to that, Reverend?"

One of the two clerics dropped his eyes and said in a singing voice: "Holy Father, it was the angels of Heaven who sang to you."

Rasputin smiled: "I tell *you* it was a pretty young gipsy girl."

"No," replied the priest with an obsequious smile, "I am convinced it was angels from Paradise."

They have been known to take the form of pretty young girls.

"Gypsy girls."

"They say that even gypsies can receive angels."

"No," said Rasputin, "it is not they who say it. Can you say it? Do you know gypsy girls so well?"

Rasputin turned on his heel with a smirk, and went up to an attractive young Polish woman, his intention being to take her into his little room. He caressed her casually, but immediately turned to the two Moscow ladies again; perceiving their coldness, he rushed madly into the dining-room, where he ramped about furiously. A violent crash was heard like china smashing. Dunia, terrified, hurried after him, while all the rest of the company hardly dared to breathe.

Grigori Efimovich reappeared, looking savage, as if he would have liked to destroy everything that crossed his path. Munia Golovina stood petrified, and gazed at her holy starets with an expression of extreme terror; she, like the other worshippers, seemed at that moment to fear Rasputin as she would have feared the wrath of God. At this critical moment the telephone bell rang, and Aniushka announced that the Tsaritsa requested Rasputin to come to see her. This gave a new turn to the situation: Princess Shakhovskaia said that Rasputin absolutely must have a little fresh air before going to Tsarskoe Selo, and she proposed a short sleigh ride.

"I will go if the Moscow ladies will come too," said Grigori Efimovich defiantly, like a spoilt child.

Lenochka and Lella agreed; Dunia hurried downstairs to order a sleigh, and a few minutes later the company set out. The starets in fur coat and beaver cap strode through the ante-room and nodded kindly to the petitioners still waiting: "Have a little patience, dear friends, I'll be back immediately; but I have to attend to an important matter."

And all the women, officers, clerics, peasants, and financiers who had not yet transacted their business actually waited for Rasputin's return. He appeared again about half an hour later, and at once resumed his dealings with the petitioners and their affairs.

* * * * *

Almost every day when Rasputin was engaged with his ladies and suppliants, the door bell would ring and an elegantly dressed gentleman enter, whose appearance was curiously different from the rest of the crowd thronging the ante-room. This was Manasevich-Manuilov, an official of the Ministry of the Interior

~~terior~~, a man rather under middle height, dressed with the slightly exaggerated elegance often to be seen in little men. It seemed as though he tried to make up for the insignificance of his appearance by paying particular attention to his clothes. His suits were made of the finest materials by the best tailors in St. Petersburg; his hair and hands were unusually well cared for, he always looked as if he had just been shaved, and fragrant powder subdued the greasy shine of his skin to a pleasant dim lustre. Whatever the time of day might be, he always gave the impression that he had just left the hairdresser's and was about to pay a very important call on a minister or a distinguished lady. The expression of his face, his walk, the movements of his hands and arms, the intonations of his voice, were all in complete harmony with the too careful toilettes; all had the same studied correctness.

Manasevich-Manuilov was a regular visitor of Rasputin's; he would often call at the house several times a day. No one else was so sure of being received, and there was no other visitor to whom the starets would listen so willingly and interestedly. Manuilov was aware of his privileged position, but to all appearances made no particular use of it; however often he appeared in a day he never permitted himself the slightest carelessness in the observance of external forms, and nothing in his demeanour betrayed the intimacy existing between him and the starets. However urgent his business, or however dissatisfied he felt, not the slightest sign of it was apparent; he always preserved an attitude of calm composure and conscious dignity. His face beamed with the same amiable and winning smile; but this gaiety never overstepped the bounds of a certain distant reserve or degenerated into obtrusive joviality. The whole appearance of Manasevich-Manuilov, from his faultless dress to the equally faultless play of his features, was the very model of a cultivated and well-bred society man.

But behind this correct appearance was concealed one of the boldest and most unscrupulous rascals of the time, whose whole life was a series of infamies, impostures, blackmail, and shady business.

The son of a Jewish merchant of Gurevich, he had contrived

when still a boy to attract the interest of old Prince Meshcherski. That one-time friend of Dostoevski, the influential politician and editor of the reactionary review *Grazhdanin*, as he grew older, took increasing pleasure in pretty, girlish-looking boys, a fact which young Manuilov soon managed to exploit for his own advantage. Prince Meshcherski befriended the promising lad, and preferred him to all his other "spiritual sons"; he had him dressed by the best tailors, gave him a generous allowance of pocket-money, and procured him the entry to the best society in St. Petersburg.

Ere long, however, young Manuilov felt a keen desire to use his latent talents in other directions as well, and soon succeeded in winning the confidence of the St. Petersburg secret police. On their behalf he journeyed to Paris, not to the *ville lumière* of the rich young men of St. Petersburg, but to the centre of the anti-Tsarist revolutionary movement. There he spied with such success that his superior officers expressed their very great admiration for his talents, and he rapidly became the right hand of Rashkovski, the chief representative of the Okhrana in Paris.

His career as a spy was as adventurous as it was successful. In Paris he managed to obtain a sight of the secret documents of the Prefecture of Police; in Rome he got on the track of a conspiracy against Russia; in London and the Hague he contrived to get in touch with the members of Japanese military missions and discover their secrets; but his master stroke was made during the Russo-Japanese War, when he succeeded in deciphering the Japanese code and, by its aid, read the secret despatches of several Japanese embassies in Europe. He organized the Russian counter-espionage service in Vienna, Stockholm, and Antwerp, got possession of the diplomatic correspondence between the accredited representatives of the neutral powers in St. Petersburg and their respective governments on the subject of their negotiations with Japan and, by bribing an employee of the embassy in Madrid, obtained the German code and thereby successfully organized a secret surveillance of the Baltic Fleet. As a reward for his activities he was decorated on this occasion with the Persian Orders of the Sun and the Lion, the Order of Vladimir IV, and the Spanish Order of Isabella.

Meanwhile, he also busied himself with espionage of various kinds in internal politics, and here, too, he attained considerable success. Thus the secret archives of Count Witte fell into his hands, which enabled him, by handing over these compromising documents to the Opposition, to deprive this statesman of his office. Soon after this he sold important Russian State papers to Burtsev, the revolutionary, who started an anti-Russian campaign in America on the strength of them. Manuilov had also entered into relations with the monk Gapon, once, under the mask of a convinced revolutionary, in order to induce him to take violent action against the Government, an attempt that led to the events of "bloody Sunday" before the Winter Palace, and another time in order to have Gapon assassinated at the request of the Government.

In addition to this important State business he by no means disdained small private enterprises: he promised to provide exiled Jews with residential permits in return for large sums of money, which undertakings he did not carry out; he mulcted several people of considerable amounts on the delusive hope of releasing them from military service, and here and there set Jewish pogroms on foot for his own private purposes.

On this occasion Manuilov, too sure of his omnipotence and perhaps also egged on by his indomitably adventurous spirit, went too far and was on the verge of a criminal investigation which threatened to become a great scandal. But even here he was able to escape the fate hanging over him, for one day the advocate entrusted with the investigation received a laconic order to drop the case. A little later Manuilov was again playing a great part, and managed to blackmail the rich Colonel Meksa-sudi for large sums.

St. Petersburg society was well aware of this man's dark past—and present; but knew far too much about his power and the danger of his influence to treat him with anything but the utmost politeness and devotion. He himself was thoroughly imbued with the consciousness of his influence, and allowed it to appear to the outer world by his self-assured and dignified bearing.

When he came into Rasputin's waiting-room, he would draw

off his gloves at the door, hand his hat, coat, and silver-handled walking-stick to the maid with an easy gesture, bow a courteous greeting to all, and approach the starets with an elegant swaying walk.

At Manasevich-Manuilov's entrance Rasputin would leave any unlucky petitioner who might be putting his appeal to him and, forgetting him in a second, rush to meet the new visitor with his big, uncontrolled movements, embracing him with boisterous heartiness, and kissing him on both cheeks.

When Manuilov had freed himself with indulgent superiority from the arms of the holy father, the two of them would generally pace up and down the ante-room for a few minutes before going into the office with its crowd of commission agents, while Manuilov hastily told the starets the news which had brought him. The gathering in the waiting-room had frequent opportunity to observe the eager, low-voiced conversations between Rasputin and Manuilov; the latter took the starets by the arm with an elegant, careless gesture, and whispered to him in an undertone. The suppliants could catch only a word here and there, and had to content themselves with watching their expressions; but even this, quite apart from the subject of the unheard conversation, in itself produced a very peculiar effect. Manuilov's whole appearance, his confident, careless smile, his way of simply taking the revered miracle-man by the arm, were all strangely different from the humble behaviour of the other people in this room.

And in conversation with him the starets also seemed to undergo a queer change; as the annoyed suppliants, in whom Rasputin no longer displayed the faintest interest, saw the two men pacing up and down, side by side, it seemed as if suddenly everything that had lent the face of the starets its air of monastic goodness and fatherliness fell away like a mask; before their eyes appeared all at once the brutal face of a cunning peasant broker; even the beard which had previously made him so dignified and pious-looking was transformed at such moments into the waving reddish beard of a horse-coper. Confused by this incomprehensible sorcery, the suppliants stared helplessly at Grigori Efimovich. Not until Manuilov let go the arm of the

holy father, and he could once more attend to his flock with his kind and fatherly glance and his right hand raised in blessing, did the hellish spell vanish that for a few moments had obscured their faith in the divinity of Rasputin.

Manuilov was better acquainted than almost anyone else with all the weaknesses of the holy man; he was as well informed as only a man can be about his partner in somewhat shady business. Perhaps he was the only person who had not fallen under the personal fascination of Rasputin, for feelings like reverence, humility, or bewitchment were entirely foreign to the experienced Manuilov. The indissoluble tie between him and Grigori Efimovich was sober business considerations, the knowledge that the starets was an important factor in his own commercial speculations.

In the days before he entered Rasputin's service he had been one of his bitterest opponents, for previously it had seemed to him advisable to insinuate himself into the confidence of Rasputin's enemy, the influential General Bogdanovich, by a campaign against the miracle-worker. However, during a sleepless night, he came to the conclusion that it would be better to change sides, especially as the then Minister of the Interior, Maklakov, had just come out energetically in favour of the starets. From that moment Manasevich-Manuilov became one of Rasputin's most zealous and devoted adherents, and immediately betrayed to him the intrigues of the circle of which General Bogdanovich was the centre.

This change of attitude very soon proved useful for his career: the Empress learned of his conversion and was not sparing in her recognition. Manuilov advanced rapidly and finally became secretary to the Prime Minister. It befell in this way. Rasputin made the closer acquaintance of Boris Stürmer through the intermediacy of Manasevich-Manuilov. The latter arranged a meeting between the two at the flat of his mistress, Lerma-Orlova, the actress, at which Grigori Efimovich was to decide whether Stürmer was a suitable candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

The meeting took place in somewhat dramatic circumstances: Manuilov, who was passionately in love with Lerma, had that very day caught his lady straying, and discovered that she had

deceived him with Pets, a riding-master. He was mad with jealousy and rage, and was on the point of beating his beloved when the bell rang and Stürmer was announced; a few minutes later the starets also appeared.

Now Manuilov's whole future depended on this conversation between Rasputin and Stürmer, for Stürmer had made him great promises in the event of his becoming Prime Minister. So poor Manuilov was torn intolerably between his personal feelings and considerations of State interests and his future career. He ran from one room to the other, comforting and propitiating the howling Lerma in one, and advocating the candidature of Stürmer in the other.

However, this historic meeting finally ended to the satisfaction of all concerned. Rasputin had carried away a favourable impression of Stürmer, and had actually kissed him at parting; Stürmer was beside himself with joy, embraced Manuilov, and promised him that in future he would treat him like a son and give him any post he liked. Manuilov's amorous difficulty also ended happily, for his prospective advancement to be secretary to the new Prime Minister impressed the little actress, and she decided that she preferred to let the riding-master go. Furthermore, Manuilov got into touch with Beletski, denounced Pets for having engaged in the sale of horses to the enemy, and succeeded in having his rival put in prison. While the latter sat in jail and waited for his innocence to be proved, Manuilov was able to enjoy undisturbed the love of his lady. At the same time he was increasingly overwhelmed with requests from bankers and business men, and loaded with bribes; he also secured entry to the most distinguished society, even that of the diplomatic representatives of the foreign great powers.

Rasputin had no illusions about Manuilov's motives in coming over to his side; he knew the past of the secretary and his character, and was only too well aware that his service was due solely to practical considerations. But, with his peasant artfulness, he also recognized that no adherence resulting from personal admiration and esteem is so firm and reliable as one that depends entirely on sober business considerations. Since Manuilov derived his power and influence from the power and influence of

Scene

Rasputin, the latter could rely on his devotion with an easy mind.

Nor was it hidden from the starets that Manuilov had not severed his former relations with the secret police, but that, on the contrary, he had been charged by Beletski with the special function of keeping the police informed of all the political and financial plans of the starets. The secretary himself had made no secret to Grigori Efimovich about the mission he had been entrusted with; but the starets contrived to profit by his friend's connection with the Okhrana, for he had easily induced Manuilov in turn to inform him of the secret designs and plans of the police. In these circumstances Grigori Efimovich was quite indifferent to the fact that Manasevich-Manuilov from time to time sent exhaustive reports about him to Beletski.

He did not even trouble to conceal from Manuilov anything he did or neglected to do; Manuilov had the entry to Rasputin's flat at all times of the day and night; and all the pigeon-holes in his desk were open to him. Manuilov made use of this unreserved confidence on the part of his holy friend by appearing at his house at all hours, interfering in the business of the waiting crowd in the ante-room, and taking part in almost all the affairs transacted in the office.

While Grigori Efimovich was conferring with Manuilov in the ante-room, the door of the office would frequently open, and a dark, middle-aged man with a pronounced Jewish cast of countenance would appear in the doorway, bowing friendly and respectful greetings. This was Simanovich, Rasputin's first private secretary, who sometimes came to summon one of the waiting crowd into the office, and sometimes to go up and ask the starets a question in a low voice.

Whenever the door opened the crowd in the ante-room had a fleeting glimpse of the office. Several men, close together, sat round the table; some of them were bent over documents and notebooks, apparently busied in making important notes, while others talked excitedly together with vehement gesticulations. Almost all were shabbily dressed, two or three wore Russian shirts and looked like little commercial employees, the rest were typical representatives of the lower Jewish financial world of

St. Petersburg, with their ugly little eyes and reddish goatees.

With his back against the enormous desk, on which mountains of opened and unopened letters and telegrams lay in a confused jumble, stood Dobrovolski, Rasputin's second private secretary, calling out something from time to time to the men sitting round the table. Whereupon they would almost simultaneously bury their noses in their notebooks and enter Dobrovolski's information.

This picture of a crowd of excited figures with notebooks, round a man who called out names and figures, was strongly reminiscent of a bucket-shop, and in a certain sense this is a really apt description of Rasputin's office. For his various friends and secretaries, by using his connections and influence, had contrived to establish a flourishing business establishment there. Besides the four secretaries proper, who relieved each other at regular intervals, and of whom Simanovich, at one time a diamond-cutter, and Dobrovolski, a former national school inspector, had won Rasputin's special confidence, a whole staff of brokers and agents of all kinds functioned there.

The fact that almost all the influential men in Russia daily assembled, either in person or through accredited representatives, in the waiting-room of the miracle-worker made it possible to carry out on the spot, without any bureaucratic delays, big commercial business, the granting of concessions, stock exchange transactions, and political wire-pulling. People arrived in the morning with their business, explained it to the head of the house himself or to the competent secretary, and waited for the appearance of Rubinstein, the banker, Bishop Varnava, one of the ministers, the Tsar's adjutant-general, or the influential "mother of the Church," Countess Ignatiev. The secretaries attended to the rest, and usually the desired document was ready by the afternoon, and the petitioner could leave the house of the starets with everything nicely settled.

In that Russia where all business, whatever its nature, and however well it might be bolstered up by patronage and bribes, had to go on a weary and complicated way through a thousand official departments, Rasputin's office was distinguished by its functioning with undreamt-of rapidity. So it is easy to under-

stand that this undertaking flourished as no other business in Russia, and that the number of its clients steadily increased.

The starets himself troubled very little about the technical details; the real manipulation he left entirely to his secretaries. In this way he was enabled to preserve to the full his peasant primitiveness. He treated the most complicated case, which must in reality have been far beyond his scope, with a naïve and original peasant good sense, without allowing himself to be confused by incomprehensible details, and in this way was successful: the most cunning and subtle stock exchange operators were powerless before the sound instinct and the gaze, unconfused by expert knowledge, of the wonder-worker of Pokrovskoe, who, with an unerring instinct, recognized the important points of every transaction, however difficult, and stuck to them with the utmost tenacity.

Just as he wrote with a few clumsy strokes of the pen those letters of introduction by the aid of which the recipients penetrated to Tsarskoe Selo itself, in the same way he dealt with great financial affairs, in a clumsy, primitive, but successful fashion. He hardly ever wrote more than a few words to the personages whose help he needed: "My dearest friend, do it. Grigori." These homely lines, surmounted by a simple sign of the cross, worked like magic: they were enough to make bank directors and ministers carry out apparently impossible demands. In the course of time he evolved an even simpler and more convenient method: in his leisure time he composed a supply of these stereotyped letters, "My dear friend, do it," so that in business hours he had only to fill in the addresses. Often he even neglected to do this, and left it to the person concerned, armed with this blank introduction, to call on whomever he liked.

A young girl who once visited Rasputin, and was summoned by him into the little room, left a description of the procedure followed by the starets in distributing letters to petitioners. During their conversation he was called into the waiting-room and, returning immediately, looked in vain for a ready-made letter of introduction. He excused himself, saying: "I must write a letter quickly: there is a man for whom I must settle some business."

He then seized a pen and began to write unwieldily, muttering each word aloud. As if he were guiding the pen in another person's hand, he laboriously scratched a few uneven characters, as though sticking each letter on to the paper.

"I hate writing," he said, breaking off, and embracing the girl. "Oh, how I hate writing! It is quite different with the living word: there you can express your thoughts more easily. But this is only a scribble, nothing but a scribble. Look, this is all I have written: 'My dearest friend. Be good enough to see to this. Grigori.' "

"But why do you not write the address?" asked the young lady.

He smiled absent-mindedly. "What for? The man himself will know which minister he needs. It's all the same to me. I write 'My dearest friend,' and that's enough. I always write like that."

Later, when the press of business in Rasputin's office assumed even greater proportions, he frequently distributed a bundle of ready-made letters of this kind to Simanovich and Dobrovolski. In consequence, the two secretaries immediately took on great importance in the eyes of the brokers and speculators waiting in the ante-room. Simanovich, in particular, enjoyed the greatest esteem: when he appeared at the door of the office backs bent low, and he met the most submissive glances from many uneasy little eyes.

If the starets himself was not present one could thus confidently address oneself to his representatives, Simanovich or Dobrovolski: they, too, took bribes and valuable presents with equal unconstraint, and they had in their pocket-books a sufficient supply of letters of recommendation signed by Rasputin.

Grigori Efimovich freely permitted his secretaries to transact profitable business from time to time in his name, and to slip the proceeds into their own pockets. To Simanovich, in particular, he was sincerely attached, and seldom refused him a request. Their friendship dated back to the time when Rasputin was a wandering pilgrim. It was in 1900, in Kazan station, that Grigori Efimovich first became friendly with the diamond-cutter, and their relations were further strengthened at a second meet-

ing in Kiev, where Simanovich was still keeping a little jeweller's shop.

Born in the ghetto of a little town in South Russia, Simanovich learnt the jeweller's craft and began to lend out his savings at a high rate of interest. He had a hard life until the Russo-Japanese War gave him the opportunity for an ingenious marauding campaign. Armed with a trunk full of playing-cards, he betook himself to the seat of war and established a travelling gaming-table there. As he had not neglected to familiarize himself with all the niceties of card-sharping, he returned from Manchuria a rich man, to carry on his earlier trading in diamonds and also his moneylending business and his gambling enterprises in European Russia. As a moneylender he soon became one of the chief props of young aristocrats in need of money in St. Petersburg and Moscow. In the capital he resumed his former friendly relations with Rasputin, for he saw immediately how valuable the starets' influence could be for his own business affairs. Moreover, he had urgent need of a powerful protector, for the police were well aware of his objectionable undertakings, and had more than once been on the point of expelling him from the capital. As Rasputin's secretary he was safe from this danger.

Grigori Efimovich not only valued Simanovich for his business efficiency, but he also loved him as a man, in consequence of which the one-time diamond-cutter came to exercise a considerable personal influence over him. Simanovich used this not only for his business, but also to further the interests of the Jewish cause, and to secure the repeal of several oppressive laws directed against his race. How much Father Grigori, the Russian peasant, sectarian, and proclaimer of a new Gospel, loved the little, uneducated, homely Jew may be gauged by the fact that he once honoured him with his photograph with an inscription: "To the best of all the Jews."

Perhaps it was just the lack of education and the primitive cunning of Simanovich that particularly attracted Rasputin to him, for in these qualities he must have felt the Jew's kinship to himself. He did not need to stand on ceremony or put on company manners with Simanovich, but could be open and at his ease.

Grigori Efimovich had become so accustomed to confidential intercourse with his first secretary that he used to discuss the most important affairs with him, and once even took this little Jewish usurer with him to Tsarskoe Selo. On this historic day Simanovich's son was able with justifiable pride to tell his neighbours: "Papa has been summoned to Tsarskoe Selo to-day with Grigori Efimovich, to consult with the Tsar about the opening of the Duma."

In addition to Manasevich-Manuilov, Simanovich, and Dobrovolski, still another strange individual was to be encountered daily at Rasputin's flat, a certain Mikhail Otsupa-Snarski, who nearly always accompanied the starets on his visits to women, places of entertainment, and other orgies. He was always in readiness in the starets' rooms to perform such aide-de-camp's duties, although he fulfilled no particular function of his own. Introduced to Rasputin by Manuilov, Snarski, like Manuilov himself, Simanovich, Dobrovolski, and all the other faithful followers, was in the service of the secret police, but he was at the same time a faithful servant of Rasputin. He and his patron Manuilov had, through their connection with the Okhrana, succeeded in saving the starets from many unpleasantnesses and dangers. On one occasion Khvostov and his assistant Beletski made a plan to entrap the starets and have him beaten, with the object of winning laurels by releasing him at the last moment, and posing as having rescued him from a position of great peril. For this purpose, Snarski, whose flat was opposite Rasputin's, was to invite him to a drinking party and deliver him up to disguised police agents when he left the house drunk. Snarski accepted the commission and the money to carry it out, but at once informed Rasputin of the plot. Then the three of them, Manuilov, Snarski, and the starets, stayed comfortably in Rasputin's flat, and over their merrymaking with women and wine looked on mockingly while Khvostov and Beletski, with their band of rescuers, met in Snarski's house according to plan, and had to retire again in a rage over the failure of their plot.

During the morning receptions the door would frequently open to admit Ossipenko, the secretary of the Metropolitan Pitirim, who came to wait on the starets. Pitirim, that high clerical dig-

nitary, as far as possible avoided public meetings with Rasputin, for fear of causing scandal and offence by intercourse with one so detested in clerical circles. He regularly sent his secretary in his stead, and in time the latter became so accustomed to representing the prince of the Church that his gestures and speech gradually assumed a peculiar kind of unctuous dignity.

Ossipenko was thrown rather off his balance by the alien deportment imposed upon him, and he behaved as if he himself were the Metropolitan. The Chief of Police, Beletski, had a disastrous experience of this in his own person, for when he tried to enlist Ossipenko in his espionage service by a gift of three hundred roubles, the secretary pocketed the money with a dignified gesture, and never wasted a moment on the business itself.

* * * * *

The guests in the waiting-room gradually dispersed; one by one the brokers and speculators left the office, with their documents under their arms, some alone, some talking in groups. The secretaries, assistants, and adjutants of the starets reached for their leather coats, hats, and furs, stuffed their portfolios under their arms, and took their leave. Meanwhile, in the dining-room, the women disciples were taking a touching farewell of their holy father, whom they would not see again till next morning. He embraced them one by one, kissed them on the mouth, and distributed little bits of wholemeal rusks among them, which they carefully wrapped in silk handkerchiefs and put in their pockets. Some of them whispered softly to Dunia, and asked her to give them some soiled linen of Rasputin's to wash, the dirtiest and most perspiration-stained she could find. The maid disappeared, and returned with the desired bundles of dirty linen, which she distributed. Then they all took their leave and departed by the back stairs.

CHAPTER X

IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES

“**I** FOLLOWED the maid through the door on the right,” relates Vera Alexandrovna Shukovskaia, “and found myself in a long, narrow room with a single window; Dunia then departed, closing the door carefully behind her.

“I inspected my surroundings. Against the wall, close to the door, stood a bed, the bulging mattress covered by a shabby, bright-coloured silk coverlet; next to it, against the same wall, was a wash-stand, and near it a lady’s *escritoire*, with a cheap writing-case, some penholders, dirty pens, and pencils; there was also a gold watch lying there, with the imperial arms on the case. In the middle of the room stood a table and two chairs and, in front of the window, a lady’s walnut toilet table with a looking-glass, on which lay two opened telegrams and some letters. In this corner of the room there was not a single ikon to be seen; but by the window stood a big photograph of the altar of the Cathedral of Saint Isaac, hung with ribbons of various colours. I could not help remembering that it is also the custom of the *Khlysty* to place their ikons, adorned with ribbons, by the window.

“Soon I heard Rasputin’s quick step, the door opened, and he came in. He brought up a chair, sat down opposite me, took my legs between his knees, and, bending forward, asked: ‘What good things have *you* to say to me?’

“‘There is not much that is good in life,’ I answered. He laughed and I saw his white peasant’s teeth, which reminded one of an animal’s fangs.

“‘That’s *your* opinion, is it? Is anything going wrong with *you*?’

“He stroked my face and added: ‘Listen to what I am going to say to *you*. Do *you* know the psalm: “From my youth up the

lusts of the flesh have tormented me; Lord Jesus Christ, do not condemn me therefor"? Do *you* know it?' He blinked, and let his eyes glide over me in a rapid, fleeting glance, which flamed up in an instant, then died away.

" 'I know it very well,' I replied, without catching his drift.

" 'No, just wait a little,' he interrupted, pressing my knees more firmly. 'I will explain to *you* how everything stands. I tell *you* that people may sin up to the age of thirty; but then it is time to turn to God, do *you* see? And when *you* have once learned to surrender *your* thoughts completely to God, *you* may sin again, for that is a sin of a special kind—do *you* follow? And as far as sin generally is concerned, *you* can be freed from it again by repentance. Only repent of everything, then everything is good again. Look here, go to Communion next week, will *you*?'

" 'No, I will not,' I replied.

"He became restive, bent his head down quite close to me, stroked my shoulders and hands, and said: 'Stop, stop! Not so fast. I will explain everything. Words alone, my little soul, *you* will of course not understand; *you* must be convinced by deeds. Only come to me often, little honey bee, love me and then *you* will understand everything. Love is the most important thing. From the loved one every word is clear; but so long as I am a stranger to *you* I may say what I like, and it will only go in at one ear and out at the other. Perhaps someone has told *you* something already? Or have *you* already several admirers?'

"I leant back involuntarily, since he had pressed too close to me and was literally clinging to me. Suddenly he kissed me rapidly on the corner of the mouth; but he did this so simply and as a matter of course that it was impossible for me to object.

" 'Why do *you* trouble with all these people?' he whispered, with his eyes almost closed. 'Come to me, send them all to the devil; then I will explain all life to *you*.'

"Dunia appeared to call him to the telephone; a few minutes later he returned and sat down opposite me again, pressing my knees firmly in his as before.

" 'Well, and what else have *you* to say to me, my angel?' A sharp flash shot from his eyes, he bent over me and whispered

hurriedly: 'Now I shall not let *you* go again. Once *you* have come to me *you* will not escape again! Understand clearly, I will do nothing to *you*, only come, my juicy cherry.' He gnashed his teeth.

" 'Why shouldn't I come?' I answered gaily.

" 'What is *your* telephone number?' And, stretching in front of me, he seized a pencil and a piece of paper, and shoved both towards me. While I wrote he bent over me, squeezed my shoulders, and whispered in my ear with hot breath: 'Well, and what more have *you* to say to me?'

"I indignantly pushed his hand away. 'I came to you so that you could give me advice. You know well, don't you, where truth is and where sin is?'

"He looked at me searchingly. 'Do *you* know it?'

" 'No, I have no idea.'

"Rasputin smiled slightly, bent forward, and spoke rapidly: 'It is all due to *your* reading too many books; in them, the books, there is often no meaning; they only make the soul uneasy. *You* see, I have another friend, who reads so much, a very special person; perhaps *you* know her, Militsa Nikolaevna, the Grand Duchess. She has read through all the wisdom of the books; but she has not found what she seeks. We have talked a great deal together; she has a good brain; but she can find no peace. The first thing is love, then peace comes also. If *you* go on as *you* are doing, *you* will never find peace. She also asked about sin, and she also did not understand. . . .

" 'And you understand?' I asked. He wrinkled his brow and looked me steadily in the eyes.

" 'If *you* wish to know, only he commits a sin who seeks sin. But in him who merely passes through it, sin has no part. If *you* like, I will show it all to *you*: go next week to Communion, and then come to me; while *you* still have Paradise in *your* soul, I will show *you* sin, so that *you* will not be able to stand on *your* feet!

" 'I don't believe that,' I said, incredulously; but I felt very queer; like a magician he whispered with voluptuously open mouth: 'Do *you* want me to show *you*?'

"He looked at me, and all at once his eyes again became kind, friendly, and passionless. In an unexpectedly gentle voice he asked me: 'Why do *you* look at me like that, my darling?'

"Pulling my head towards him, he kissed me with priestly dignity, and said softly: 'Oh, my love. . . .'

"I looked at him in confusion. Had it all been a dream, that lustful whisper of 'Do *you* want me to show *you*'? Now, there sat before me a simple, honest peasant, with a thick, dark beard and a meek look in his light eyes.

"I stood up, saying: 'I must go.'

"'But see here, my dear, only come again,' said he, rising and embracing me closely. 'If *you* are bored, ring me up. When will *you* come, you little darling?'

"'I am engaged until Saturday,' I replied. He said eagerly: 'Good, good, come on Saturday evening at ten o'clock. Will that suit *you*?'

"'Why such a late hour?'

"He wrinkled his brows: 'Well, come earlier, come at half-past nine, but be sure to come, as I shall expect *you*. *You* like me, don't *you*, so come. Will *you* come?'

"It was a habit of his to repeat the last word twice.

"'I will come,' and with these words I departed."

* * * * *

"On Saturday evening I rang the bell of Rasputin's flat at the appointed time. Dunia, the maid, opened the door, and said in a very unfriendly way that Grigori Efimovich was not at home.

"'That is impossible,' I replied; 'he told me himself to come at this time.'

"Dunia inspected me with an oblique, distrustful glance, but showed me into the ante-room, where all the pegs were already hung with beautiful furs. As on my first visit, she did not let me take off my things here, but ushered me into the empty reception room. I sat down at the window. I was annoyed and cross. Dunia disappeared several times when a bell rang, and then brought in a hissing copper samovar, which was so heavy that she bent under the weight of it.

"'Ah, a samovar too,' I thought. 'As enormous as those the peasants have at home.'

"The door leading to the ante-room opened and Rasputin came in with rapid steps. He wore a blue shirt, plush trousers, and brightly polished boots.

"*'You* have come then, my little soul,' he said, coming up to me. He put his arm round my shoulders and bent to kiss me, but I drew myself away.

"*'Grigori Efimovich,*' I said angrily, 'please inform your servants when you invite anyone to see you.'

"Rasputin exerted himself to restore me to good humour. 'Now, don't be angry, my little soul, I have told her often enough already, the tiresome creature, not to cheek my guests. This time I did not definitely tell her that *you* were coming, but forgive me, my darling!' He kissed me and drew me into the ante-room. 'Let us go to them,' he urged, as he helped me off with my things; suddenly he looked at me meditatively, and said: 'But perhaps it will be better if *you* remain alone, else *you* will run away from me in the end, if *you* see them in there.'

"*'If I* want to run away I will do it without that,' I retorted. 'At the worst it can only be a little uncomfortable, since I am not acquainted with your ladies.'

"Rasputin shook his head impatiently. 'If I am acquainted with *you* that's enough. Let us go, my little soul.' Putting his arm round me he led me into the dining-room, stepped up to the table, and said: 'See, I am bringing her to you; she is fond of me. . . .'

"I greeted them and sat down in an empty seat at the lower end of the table. Rasputin sat beside me. My embarrassment gradually grew less, and I began to look attentively at this extraordinary company.

"There were about ten ladies present, and among them a solitary young man in a morning coat, whose gloomy air showed that he was anxious about something. Near him, buried in an arm-chair, sat a young, pregnant woman with her coat open; her face was curiously pale, and her big, light-blue eyes gazed at Rasputin with devotion and worship. They were Mr. and Mrs. von Pistolkors, as I learned later from some remarks thrown out; the husband had come because he did not wish to leave his wife alone. Near Alexandra von Pistolkors sat old Madame

Golovina; her pale, faded face affected me pleasantly by its calm distinction. She acted as hostess, did the honours, and kept a general conversation going.

"Not far from her, at Rasputin's right, sat a beautiful, but no longer young, lady, magnificently dressed; near the young man sat a somewhat corpulent, melancholy woman in an ill-fitting grey dress. She looked as if she had just stopped weeping; her eyes were red, and red patches burned on her cheeks. She was the proprietress of one of the best-known private girls' schools, an old and devoted friend of Grigori Efimovich, who looked on him as a helper, adviser, and friend, and took no step without his blessing. At the moment, it is true, she, like old Madame Golovina, was more in the mood to see his defects, among which his too free intercourse with women obviously came first.

"Near her sat a big, sumptuous lady of uncertain age, elegantly dressed in deep mourning; like the lady in grey, she was silent all the time.

"Her neighbour interested me from the first; she was a big, full, fair-haired woman, not beautiful, and most tastefully dressed, but striking on account of her bright-red, very sensual mouth and her excitedly flashing eyes. In her face there was something equivocal, deceptive, and at the same time seductive. Faces like this may be found both among self-sacrificing heroines and also among women full of desire and depravity, who abandon themselves to vice as quietly and naturally as other women take a bath and then go to sleep in a very soft bed. It was Madame Anna Vyrubova.

"Munia Golovina, who was sitting beside her, looked at me with her gentle, blinking, pale-blue eyes longer and more frequently than the other guests. She wore a thin, light-grey silk dress and a little white hat with violets; she looked small and delicate; her movements were uncertain, and her voice very quiet. In her every look, her every word, was such meekness, touching devotion, and complete submission to Rasputin's will that involuntarily I asked myself: 'What has he done to deserve this?'

"When I looked at Munia's neighbour, for a second or two

I was unable to take my eyes from her face. Dark, almost yellowish, with great elongated black eyes, she seemed lifeless, and yet attractive with her expression of secret sorrow. Her complexion was unnaturally pale, which made her thin red lips stand out more sharply from her face. She sat there quiet and uninterested, her hands buried in an ermine muff. It was the Grand Duchess Militsa Nikolaevna, 'the Montenegrin.'

"When I seated myself Rasputin proceeded to entertain me by pushing one dish after another towards me. The table was laden with an untidy confusion of food, magnificent tarts and bowls of fruit alongside heaps of peppermint cakes and big coarse cracknels. There was jam in smeary glasses and a grey earthenware dish full of black bread and gherkins. In front of Rasputin stood a bright-coloured, deep plate of boiled eggs and a bottle of wine.

" 'Drink your tea now, drink your tea,' said Rasputin, and pushed forward the plate with the eggs. Immediately all the ladies, with their eyes sparkling, stretched their hands towards him.

" 'Father, an egg, please.'

"The expression of morbidly impatient desire in the eyes of the pregnant lady was particularly noticeable. I looked at them with amazement, almost with terror; it all seemed so extraordinary to me.

"Rasputin bent down to the table, seized a handful of eggs, shelled them, and laid one in each of the outstretched hands. Afterwards he turned to me and said, 'Will *you* also have an egg?'

"I refused on the plea that I was not hungry; they all looked at me in amazement, and then lowered their eyes. 'Well, well,' said Rasputin quickly, and turned round again.

"Anna Vyrubova now came up to him and handed him two pickled gherkins on a slice of black bread. Rasputin crossed himself and began to eat, biting alternately at the bread and the gherkins. He ate always with his fingers; even with fish he disdained the use of a knife and fork. I was not yet accustomed to his peculiar way of merely giving his hands a wipe with the

table-cloth after eating, and then proceeding to stroke his neighbour, and I felt a feeling of nausea when he tried to do it to me; I leant back and hid my hands in my muff.

"‘Yes,’ said he, munching gherkins, ‘she was with me the other day, we talked much about the faith, but I could not convince her. . . .’

"‘Of what?’ I asked.

"‘Of what?’ he quickly repeated. ‘Well *you* do not go to church—is that allowed then? I tell *you*, go to church, go to communion! Why don’t *you* go?’

"‘You love the clergy then?’

"Rasputin smiled: ‘Well, I cannot exactly swear that I love them particularly; but there are believers even among them. *You* cannot go through life without the Church. In time everyone comes to it, to the Church—do *you* understand?’

"At this point old Madame Golovina joined in the conversation. ‘It is an excellent thing,’ she remarked benevolently, ‘that you feel drawn to Grigori Efimovich. He can tell you much. Come to him if only for a week, and everything will all at once become clear to you.’

"‘Hardly, hardly, not so fast as that,’ rejoined Rasputin. ‘I might try for three years at least before I did anything with her. She is a hard nut! But I am glad she has come to me, for I feel a sweetness in the heart coming to me from her, and know from that that she is a good and genuine child; for, whenever anyone comes to me and I feel this sweetness, I know it is a good person. When I feel emptiness in my heart it means that I have to do with someone bad. But I desire to talk with *you*,’ Rasputin concluded, caressing my back and shoulders. ‘Everything is well, I tell *you*, everything will be well.’

"At this point Mara came into the room; she wore a bright-red dress with a magnificent silk sash of the same colour, and her hair was carefully tied. Everybody held out their hands to welcome her: ‘Mara, Marochka, good day.’ Then Matriona Rasputin sat down in the place of honour next to old Madame Golovina.

"‘How fine it is to-day,’ I said, blinking, as the setting sun lit up the table.

"Rasputin bent over me: 'The sun has come out from behind the clouds for *your* sake, because *you* strive after good, because *your* soul is good. It is always so, *you* know: the sun shines on all who have faith. If it looks down on a house it brings some special gift to all the people in it, and if *you* begin to be troubled about *your* faith then faith immediately shines like the sun. Go to church, I tell *you*.' With this somewhat irrelevant advice he ended his obscure talk, which everyone had listened to with close attention.

"Does everything then depend on the Church?' I asked.

"Rasputin excitedly pushed his glass away and cried: 'Yes, how can *you* get on without the Church? Listen to what I am going to say, do *you* understand? I will tell *you* something about Crazy Olga, who is soon coming here. She loved God, *you* see, and conscientiously lived in accordance with religion and went to church. But the way is narrow and she missed it, *you* understand? She broke away, along with Ilfodor; but I am sorry about her. *You* will see for *yourself* what sort of clothes she comes here in, the mad bitch! She believes, poor creature, that she does me a favour with her devilish craze. I feel it in my heart: before I have finished drinking my glass of tea she will be here.'

"And actually, as if to confirm his words, a violent uproar was heard in the hall. I turned towards the half-opened door, and saw a figure on the threshold staggering in, improbably bright, broad, pale pink, puffy, dishevelled, absurd. In a high, piercing voice she shrieked in the manner of an epileptic: 'Chr-i-st is ri-s-en!'

"There, *you* see Olga, now *you* will have an experience," said Rasputin gloomily.

"At first I could distinguish nothing, and had only a vague impression of a white ball of tousled goat-skin that flew past me. The new arrival had flung herself down by Rasputin's chair, and continued her cries with her head leaning against the edge of the chair. It was a most painful sensation when I saw something emerging at my feet that looked like the neck of an animal covered with thick yellow wool. Then Madame Lokhtina raised herself a little, handed Rasputin a chocolate cake, and cried,

this time in somewhat more human tones: 'See, I have brought something for *you*, white outside, black inside.'

"Rasputin who, from her first appearance, had sat frowning with his back to her, now turned round, took the cake, pushed it carelessly on to the table, and said curtly: 'Now that will do, let me be, stop it now, Satan.'

Madame Lokhtina jumped up precipitately, took his head in her hands from behind, and covered it with wild kisses, shouting all the time in a quick, stammering voice: 'Oh my dearest . . . vessel of blessing. . . . Ah, *you* lovely beard. . . . *You* delicious hair . . . me, the martyr. . . . *You* precious pearl . . . *you* precious stone . . . *you* my adored one . . . my God . . . my beloved!'

"Rasputin struggled desperately and growled, half-suffocated: 'Away! Satan! Away, *you* devil, *you* monster! That's enough, more than enough. Ah *you*——.' What followed was a string of the filthiest abuse. Finally he tore her hands from his neck, pushed her into a corner with all his force, and shrieked, crimson, dishevelled, and breathless with anger: '*You* always put me in a sinful rage, *you* accursed abomination, *you* sickening . . .!'

"Madame Lokhtina, breathing heavily, dragged herself to the divan and sank on to it. Gesticulating with her arms, which were enveloped in bright-coloured draperies, she stormed on: 'And yet *you* are mine, and I have lain with *you*. I have lain with *you*. Oh, my life! It belongs to *you*; now for the first time I see how beautiful it is. *You* are my God! I belong to *you* and to no other. Whoever may come between us, *you* are mine and I am *yours*. However many women *you* take, no one can rob me of *you*. *You* are mine! Say, say, that *you* cannot suffer me! And yet I know that *you* love me, that *you* lo-o-ve me!'

"'*I hate you, you bitch,*' replied Rasputin, quick and decidedly. '*I tell you, I hate you, and I do not love you. The devil is in you. I'd like to kill you. I'd like to smash your jaw.*'

"'*But I am happy, happy, and you love me,*' cried Madame Lokhtina, still in the same position, bobbing up and down and waving her gay frills and ribbons. The broken springs of the divan creaked beneath her weight. 'Soon I will lie with *you* again.'

"Suddenly she ran up to Rasputin again and, with fierce, voluptuous cries, seized his head in her hands and began to kiss it madly.

"*'You devil!'* growled Rasputin, furiously. Another push, she fell against the wall, but jumped up again, and stood shouting: *'Now, strike me! Strike me, strike me!'*

"Her voice rose higher and higher, and there was such uncanny frenzy in her shrieks that everybody felt afraid.

"Then she bent her head, and tried to kiss the place on her breast where Rasputin had struck her; when she saw that this was impossible, she jumped up again, ran round and filled the air with loud, greedy, crazy kisses. She pressed her hands to her breast and then kissed them, writhing all the while in voluptuous ecstasy. Finally she became a little calmer, lay down on the sofa, and covered herself with her draperies.

"Now I was able to distinguish the details of her strange attire, which made her look like an Indian goddess. She was hung all over with finely pleated skirts of all colours; her violent movements made them flare out, and encircle her like gigantic wings. Then the long veils threaded with bright ribbons also unfolded on both sides of her face. On her head she wore a Siberian wolf-skin cap, once the property of Rasputin; the upper part of her body was clad in a red Russian shirt of Rasputin's, from which little bags hung on straps. These little bags also contained objects which had once belonged to Rasputin, dried remnants of food and several pairs of his gloves. Strings of rosaries of different colours dangled from her neck and jingled at every movement; her feet were stuck into old broken boots, which also had once been worn by Rasputin. Her face was covered with a double thickness of veiling, so I could see only her delicate, sad, and beautiful mouth.

"*'Go-od, Go-o-od, Thine is the power!'* she cried suddenly in the midst of a general silence.

"Rasputin, who had again begun to drink his tea, turned to her. *'My God, this time I'll soon lose patience. I'll crack your skull in with something, you raving mare! You have poisoned my heart, damn you! If only you would perish, if only I need never see you again.'*

"'Why do you insult her like that?' I asked indignantly, and immediately all eyes were turned on me.

"Rasputin reverted to his usual friendly tone, patted me on the shoulder, and said: 'Just think *yourself*, my dear soul, how can I help insulting her since she has deserted the Church; and not only has she fallen away herself; but she is also trying to lead Munia astray, the wretch!'

"'But you yourself have said that all must be forgiven,' I remarked.

"'What's that I hear? Who is talking so cleverly?' cried Olga Lokhtina, throwing back her veil, and looking at me searchingly with her big, dark-grey, still beautiful eyes. 'Who is she? A new one? Come here, quick, quick. On *your* knees, on *your* knees with *you*, and kiss my hand.' Stamping with impatience, she stretched out her hands and waved them around.

"'I have not the slightest desire to kneel at present,' I said. 'But I will gladly kiss your hands, even without your ordering me to.'

"'A stupid creature, I see,' cried Madame Lokhtina. 'Clever talk from a blockhead.'

"'Will *you* be quiet, *you* beribboned Satan!' growled Rasputin angrily. 'Don't drive me too far, *you* devil. It is *you yourself* who are stupid.'

"I interposed again. 'Stop insulting her,' I said impatiently.

"The ladies round the table were silent as before; their faces had gone strangely red; their eyes seemed veiled, and their breath came more quickly and jerkily. Dark patches appeared on old Madame Golovina's face.

"Rasputin turned to me curiously: "Why do *you* defend her?"

"'I am sorry for her,' I answered.

"'I reject the sympathy of men,' cried Madame Lokhtina. 'I am alone, but I am stro-o-ng! Day by day I utter the one cry; but people are deaf and blind.'

"All of a sudden old Madame Golovina turned to Madame Lokhtina. 'I cannot understand,' she said, 'why you deliberately make Grigori Efimovich angry. Don't you see for yourself how unpleasant all this is for him?'

"Then Madame Vyrubova rose from her seat, went up to

Madame Lokhtina, and, kneeling before her, took her hand and kissed it.

"'Have *you* seen it at last?' said Madame Lokhtina, very quickly. But she began at once to shout again: 'Do not forget that my hand must not be touched. Kiss it, kiss it, but do not dare to handle it.' Then she fell into a silence as sudden as her outburst, dropped her head, pushed back her veil a little, and began to inspect the guests sitting at the table.

"'I do not see my servant. Where is she, why does she not come? On *your* knees, on *your* knees, and kiss my hand!'

"Munia Golovina rose and, as Madame Vyrubova went back to her seat, went up to Madame Lokhtina and, kneeling down, kissed her hand respectfully.

"'Just wait, *you* heathen,' cried Rasputin. 'Am I never to be free of *you*, *you* carrion? As for you two,' turning to Munia and Madame Vyrubova, 'just you humiliate yourselves once more before Olga! I swear by God you shall never cross my threshold again; I shall throw you both out at the door, and her along with you, damn you! As for *you*, *you* crows' carrion, I'll find a knout for *you*. . . .'

"'God lo-o-oves the tru-u-th!' shrieked Madame Lokhtina.

"'There's no truth in *you*, *you* spawn of hell!' snarled Rasputin. Munia came back to her place with tears in her eyes and a very flushed face.

"'You will learn to know me yet, *you* unwashed fool,' threatened Rasputin once more.

"Old Madame Golovina, whose face had gradually become covered with red patches, asked timidly: 'Grigori Efimovich, why do you scold Marushka so?'

"'Why does she not listen to me, why does she commit a sin? She kisses Olga's hands and obeys the witch. Did I not say to her straight: "Do not dare to give Olga anything at all"? She gets nothing from me, the crazy creature.'

"'Am I then to sit hungry?' cried Madame Lokhtina. Suddenly her tone became quieter, and she went on in a reasonable voice: 'Am I to have nothing to eat to-day again? I ate nothing yesterday; I have no money, I gave the last to the chauffeur to-day because he drove me so nicely. I was afraid of being late,

and after all I arrived last, though I wanted to be the first to greet *you*. And now I have nothing, nothing, nothing. To-day is Atonement Sunday; people come and beg their friends for forgiveness—one gives a tip; but I have nothing, nothing at all. I am hungry myself; I have eaten nothing for two days. I should love something to eat. . . .’ And this was said in an extremely plaintive tone.

“ ‘Serves *you* right, *you* carrion,’ said Rasputin placidly.

“Munia rose, filled a plate with the soup which stood before Rasputin in a queer-shaped dish that reminded one of a wash-tub, and took it to Madame Lokhtina.

“ ‘Munia, will *you* obey or not? Do not dare to give her anything,’ said Rasputin, and added a brief but expressive term of opprobrium. Munia, however, took no notice, but pulled a round table up to the divan and placed the soup on it.

“ ‘Why is that there?’ asked Madame Lokhtina, pointing to a basket of hyacinths on the window-sill. ‘My flowers used to stand there, and my apples and oranges. My bowl used to stand there; they have eaten everything up, thrown everything away, the vile creatures!’

“Munia silently lifted the heavy basket of hyacinths from the window, and with difficulty placed it on the floor in a corner, her delicate shoulders bent with the strain. Rasputin turned round:

“ ‘There, what is going to happen,’ he cried, ‘if this cursed bitch takes Munia away from me? God Almighty, if only some one would drive this horrible woman from the town. I would fall on my knees in gratitude!’

“Old Madame Golovina turned a troubled face to Munia: ‘Marushka, what are *you* doing; why do *you* anger Grigori Efimovich?’

“ ‘Mama, please let me alone, say no more about it,’ whispered Munia almost inaudibly.

“ ‘Can’t *you* do all *you* wish?’ cried Madame Lokhtina, at once getting furious. Then she cried louder and more desperately: ‘Take a pen and paper quickly, write, and one, two, three, I fly, I fly, away! away! They will turn me out, turn me out, drag me away, drag me away, and I shall suffer anguish for *you*. Blows, chains, fetters, prison, death, all for *you*! But then I will

come back, to *you*, to *you*, under *your* roof, for *you* are mine, *you* love me, my precious darling, my bearded one, my God, my all! Only write, write.'

" 'And then everyone would say that I had driven *you* out of the town and that *you* had gone crazy because of me. I won't have that,' said Rasputin gloomily. 'The women have worried me enough without that on *your* account, *you* bitch! What am I to do with such a mad woman? *You've* long been loathsome to me, *you* abomination!'

" 'God suffers no betrayal, never! Rejoice ye over His resurrection!' Madame Lokhtina began shrieking crazily again, jumped on to the groaning divan, and moved her arms up and down like wings.

" 'The melancholy lady in grey got up, went slowly past Madame Lokhtina, took a glass of tea from the little table near the window, and returned to her seat in the same way. Madame Lokhtina rose from the divan, tore the covering from her face, and cried to Rasputin frenziedly: 'Carry me off, beat me! Insult me as *you* like, spit at me. But do not permit them to pollute my path. They must not pass by *your* holy sister. When I am with *you* they must be silent and listen. And now I will lie with *you*, I will lie with *you* immediately. . . .'

" 'Just try it, *you* bitch,' answered Rasputin in a threatening tone, rising and assuming a defensive position. 'Just touch me, and I'll smash *you* against the wall until *your* own mother won't know *you*.'

" 'I can't understand,' said Madame Golovina again, 'why you deliberately try to infuriate our Grigori Efimovich.'

" 'Madame Lokhtina drew herself up and briefly replied in a contemptuous tone: '*Tiens, je trouve votre façon de parler assez drôle, Madame, vous vous adressez à une personne sans la nommer. . . .*'

" 'Old Madame Golovina was embarrassed and replied in the same tone of studied politeness: '*Mille excuses, chère Olga Vasilievna, je n'avais aucune intention de vous offenser.*'

" 'O! *de grâce, point d'excuses!*' replied Madame Lokhtina simply and quietly, like a real woman of the world; but she immediately began again to crow like a cock and to blow kisses

through the air to Rasputin, who was pacing up and down the room. He stopped by me, pointed to Madame Lokhtina, and said in a tone of sincere sympathy: 'There, ask her *yourself* why she plays such a fool's comedy and slanders me besides, as if I had given her my blessing on it.'

" 'Who then, if not *you*,' cried Madame Lokhtina piercingly. Then she began to dance, waved her arms, and sang: "My God and Saviour! Sing ye all his praise, fall down on your faces!" Suddenly she noticed that her veils had slipped back, and that we were looking at her; she covered herself up again closely, and nodding slyly at us, said, 'Did you see anything?'

" 'Well, do as *you* like,' said Rasputin, gesticulating wildly. 'What I'd really like to do would be to wring her neck, she's such a nuisance to me, the horror! If only she would get out of my sight! I hate the carrion and her devilish masquerade! She is mad, that's all there is to it!'

"The telephone bell rang. Rasputin answered, and the usual conversation began: 'Yes—yes, I have visitors; well, I am drinking tea at the moment. Will *you* come to-morrow?' He chatted in this way for some time with the unknown lady. Then he sat down more quickly than usual, and began to eat soup with the wooden spoon from the dish in front of him; some of the ladies ate with him. Dunia brought in an enormous casserole, and set it on the little table against the wall.

" 'Have some soup,' said Rasputin to me, but I declined. 'Very well, now tell me,' he went on, wiping his moustache with his hand, '*you* think that we should not curse anybody?'

" 'Certainly I do,' I replied.

" 'Good. I agree; but how can I help cursing Olga when she behaves in this way? What else is there to do when she is the cause of their all beginning to call me Christ?'

" 'Not Christ, but God,' cried Madame Lokhtina. '*You* are the living God of Sabaoth, the living God.'

" 'There, *you* see! *You* speak to the raving lunatic,' sighed Rasputin.

" 'Ask her why she thinks *you* God,' I said.

" 'Rasputin made an impatient gesture: 'My dear soul, I

asked her that long ago! If *you* like, ask her *yourself*. She will reply at once: "On account of my good deeds."

"Does one only have to do good then," I remarked, 'to be taken for a God?'

"*You* have a try to bring her to reason, the fool," said Rasputin quickly. 'Can anyone talk to her at all? I tried to explain everything to her, but it is quite useless.'

"And what did she answer?"

"Rasputin made a resigned gesture with his hand. 'I asked her: "Does a God sleep with a woman then? Has a God children?" But she always gave the same answer: "Don't try any subterfuge, *you* can't conceal it, for I know that *you* are the God of Sabaoth."

"The li-iv-ing Go-o-d, Glory be to Thee unto eternity,' sang Madame Lokhtina. 'You all sit in Sodom and see it not. I alone cry to you in the sweat of my brow; but you have hearts of wood and will not hear.'

"Oh, what shall I do with the monster?' Rasputin rose from his chair, but all the ladies at once stretched out their hands with: 'Father, calm yourself.'

"The telephone bell rang, and Rasputin went to answer it. Dunia, the maid, came in, cleared the plates, then turned to Miss Golovina, and said: 'Munia, take the dishes to the kitchen.'

"Munia quickly rose and obediently took the dirty dishes.

"What do you mean by being so offensive, addressing people so unbecomingly?' cried old Madame Golovina indignantly. 'You can surely call my daughter by her Christian name and patronymic, as is customary!'

"Don't, Mama, why . . .' whispered Munia in a low voice when she came back.

"God loves work,' announced Madame Lokhtina.

"Well, nothing special, I have visitors with me—I am drinking tea,' sounded from the telephone.

"Madame Lokhtina suddenly calmed down, slipped quietly from the sofa, and went into the bedroom; Rasputin, who was coming back from the telephone, signed to Munia to follow her. With quick, cat-like movements Munia threaded her way behind

the ladies on the divan, and crept cautiously after Madame Lokhtina, who suddenly stopped at the door of the bedroom, turned, and said haughtily to Munia: 'What do *you* want, spying on me?'

"She spoke so proudly and imperiously that for a moment you completely forgot her crazy costume and her whole behaviour. Even Rasputin was a little perplexed, and his voice sounded different when he said: 'She is not following *you*, she is only going to arrange my shirts.'

" 'I am not interested in new things,' remarked Madame Lokhtina contemptuously. 'I will have *yours, yours*. I'll take it off *your* body. If I want to, I'll take it, and *you* will give it to me. But I must see to something there.'

"She rushed into the bedroom and Maria whisked in after her with long steps, almost leaping like an animal. Rasputin ran across the room and disappeared behind the door, which he shut after him. Immediately a furious uproar arose, something fell to the ground and smashed, then the sound of blows on something soft was heard, all drowned by inhuman howling and screeching. The cries became more and more desperate; at last a door banged, heavy steps sounded in the hall, and Madame Lokhtina came running into the dining-room, dishevelled and with her veil torn. She was shouting something unintelligible, and making convulsive movements with her hands.

"At the same instant Rasputin came out of the bedroom, breathing heavily, with his face red and bathed in sweat. Munia glided past him like a fish; she was holding something in her hand, and pushed behind the ladies again and sat down by her mother, breathing quickly. When Madame Lokhtina caught sight of her she ran towards the table, but stopped suddenly before she got there and threatened Munia with both hands. 'Muck! dirt! *you* monster. If *you* loved him *you'd* be bound to know that he can't use such State trash, but only a priceless watch with rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and amber! Like one I saw on the Nevski Prospekt. He shall have it, he shall have it. But hand over that one. Hand it over! It must be trampled to powder, trampled to dust, and thrown on the dung-heap or the ash-bin. Oh, *you* don't love him, *you* wretch, and *you* want to

quarrel with me!' Munia quickly passed a small object from one hand to the other. It was Rasputin's gold watch with the imperial arms, a present from the Tsar. For a few minutes nothing was heard but shrieking and howling, cursing, and indecent abuse. Rasputin and Madame Lokhtina talked at the same time and shouted each other down, deadening and destroying all thought. The ladies, on the other hand, sat quietly and correctly as before. Their faces merely became a little paler or redder than usual, as the case might be.

"Madame Lokhtina surrendered first, and retreated before Rasputin's attack to the divan, on which she flung herself in the silence of complete exhaustion. Rasputin sat down, breathing heavily, and wiped the sweat streaming down his face with the sleeve of his pale-blue Russian shirt. Silence reigned for a few moments, then old Madame Golovina turned to Madame Lokhtina, and said in a trembling voice: 'Is it not unscrupulous of you, Olga Vladimirovna? When you are not here we sit quietly and listen to Grigori Efimovich. But as soon as you appear there is nothing but quarreling and shouting—it's all your fault. We cannot even hear Grigori Efimovich's voice.'

"'And which of you has done anything for him, may I ask?' cried Madame Lokhtina furiously. 'Which of you glorifies his name? Who loves him more than I do? Who gives her life for him?' She began again kissing her finger-tips, throwing kisses to Rasputin, and whispering her crazy, indecent, but almost unintelligible endearments and avowals.

"Munia Golovina brought in a dish of fried fish, and handed it round, serving Madame Lokhtina first. She became suddenly quiet, took some fish, and said in a stern tone to Munia: '*You* know that *you* are guilty, Munia. Beg my pardon immediately.'

"Munia, with her shy smile, at once set the dish down on the table, went up to Madame Lokhtina again, and, kneeling at her feet, kissed her outstretched hand and bowed to the ground.

"'Marushka,' whispered her mother bewilderedly, "why do *you* do it? Why do *you* anger Grigori Efimovich?"

"Munia grew pale, shook her little head, and whispered gently as usual: 'There, now, Mama, don't bother, don't say anything about it. . . .'

"Rasputin said nothing, and Munia went on helping everybody to fish from the dish in front of her.

"Madame Lokhtina had covered her face and leant sideways, as if she were looking at something on the divan; finally she cried with a peal of triumphant laughter: 'Now I see it all! I see, there sits the white one, nothing to me, nothing to *you*, and under the protection of her honourable and prudent husband she has stolen. . . .'

"The young man in the morning coat got very red and answered sharply: 'I beg you to leave my wife's name out of the conversation.'

" 'Be silent, miserable man!' cried Madame Lokhtina, threateningly. 'How can *you* have the effrontery to speak to me in that tone?'

"Old Madame Golovina remarked again: 'You yourself are the one who prevents us from listening to Grigori Efimovich.'

"Madame Lokhtina made no reply, because at that moment, for some reason, the little table against the wall overturned with the tureen of soup on it. This caused a great uproar, everybody started, and the pregnant lady, in particular, trembled all over, and looked distractedly round her, pale as death. Munia ran for the maid, a queer confusion arose, but everybody remained in their places while the spilt fish-soup ran quickly in a little yellow trickle over the floor. Madame Lokhtina quietly rose, crept up to Rasputin, and seizing his head, began to kiss him, crying all the time: 'I have lain with *you*, I have lain with *you*. . . .'

"He pushed her away for a moment, but she came back again, stood behind him in such a position that he could not reach her with his fists, and asked him to give her a glass of wine.

" 'You'll get nothing,' he said curtly and decidedly. 'If only I were free of *you*, curse *you*,' he went on crossly, 'if only *you* would go to *your* Iliodor, the son of a dog. *You* left the Church together. I'm damned if I can see the slightest sense in what Olga and Iliodor are doing. He severed himself from the Church, and thinks me a villain, a rascal, a libertine, and a seducer, while Olga lets him lead her astray into apostasy, and yet looks

on me as the God of Sabaoth. If you were to strike me dead, I can make nothing of it.'

" 'Does Iliodor not love *you*?' cried Madame Lokhtina. 'He loves *you*, he loves *you*, oh, how he loves *you*. . . . But to me *you* are God, my bliss, and my world.'

"Rasputin beckoned with his hand. Dunia came up and whispered something to him, indicating the bedroom with her eyes. He rose quickly and went into the bedroom through the hall. Madame Lokhtina immediately rushed to the table as fast as her enormous boots would let her, seized the glass out of which Rasputin had drunk, filled it with wine, climbed on to the divan, stretched her hands out towards the farther corner of the room, and stood for some seconds with bowed head before the empty corner like a priestess celebrating a mystery. A tense, oppressive, unpleasant stillness reigned in the room. Finally Madame Lokhtina stirred again, raised the glass to her lips, slowly drank the wine, and then fell forward on the divan, where she lay with her arms outstretched and her face covered.

"Old Madame Golovina gave a loud sigh and said to Munia: why did *you* bring me here to-day? I shall be ill again.' She turned to me and said: 'If you had only seen what happened here yesterday morning. They had to restore me with bay-cherry drops, and even to-day my whole body is trembling. I simply can't remain indifferent to the sight of all these things.'

" 'Mama, stop,' whispered Munia uneasily.

" 'Why does Olga Vladimirovna behave so queerly?' I inquired.

"Munia's blinking eyes gazed at some point in the distance; with a peculiar expression of devout admiration she answered softly and happily: 'One has only to understand her.'

" 'No, no', replied her mother quickly, 'I gave that up long ago.' She pointed to the bright red spots on her cheeks, and added with slight bitterness: 'Just look what I am like! I don't want to make myself out better than I am, and I am not being a hypocrite, but all this agitates me incredibly. I have known Grigori Efimovich for four years, and I love him unreservedly. I love Olga Vladimirovna too; but her behaviour is quite incompre-

hensible to me and I cannot approve of her way of going on.'

" 'When I am silent the stones will speak,' cried Madame Lokhtina, who had suddenly come to herself again, clapping her hands. Then she got down from the divan, and crept to the door of the bedroom, through which Rasputin's hoarse murmur and a woman's laughter could be heard. She bent forward and greedily pressed her face to a crack in the creaking door.

" 'Don't come in, don't come in,' cried Rasputin crossly, and planted himself in the entrance.

"Madame Lokhtina laughed wildly, and beat with her fists on the door, crying: 'Take another, take another! Only take her in, hide her under the bed, under the bedclothes! But *you* belong to me, and I will resign *you* to no one, no one, no one! *You* may sleep with the whole world for all I care, but *you* are mine, mine!'

"She ran away from the door, and whirled round and round, and then, feeling giddy, collapsed on the divan again, muttering something to herself.

"A movement began at the table. I turned round, and saw the pregnant lady rise slowly and go up to the divan with her hands stretched out before her like a sleepwalker. Her wide-open eyes stared fixedly at Madame Lokhtina, and her dry lips were twisted. But she did not reach the divan; her husband jumped up quickly, overtook her in a few strides, and dragged her by force into the hall in spite of all her struggles and resistance. The conversation which had developed at the table suddenly ceased; silence again took possession of the room.

"It was impossible to look on indifferently any longer. The pregnant lady, by her actions, had merely expressed what had been for some time clear to the minds of all present, that they must either depart or shriek, fall into convulsions, and smash things. Madame Vyrubova rose first, and went to the bedroom; the Grand Duchess Militsa Nikolaevna and her young companion followed. The Grand Duchess turned towards the hall; but suddenly Maria Golovina rushed out of the bedroom and threw her arms round her neck. The Grand Duchess bent down, and Maria kissed her passionately, her neck, her hair, her lips, and her eyes, then she embraced her, and drew her out of the room.

"I was impatient for Rasputin to come back in order that I might say good-bye and depart. When at last he rushed in from the hall I rose, said good-bye to the others, and turned to him: 'I am going Grigori Efimovich. *Au revoir!*'"

"He came up to me quickly and, taking me by the shoulders, looked deep into my eyes and said in concern: 'Are *you* going already, darling? Well, when will *you* come again? I have taken a great fancy to *you*.'

"I remarked that he might ring me up, and a wild laugh was heard. Madame Lokhtina was writhing on the sofa and crying madly: 'I must see that! He, the God of Sabaoth, is to call up a girl on the telephone!'

"'That's enough,' I said and almost ran into the hall. Rasputin hurried after me, put his arms round me, and pressing me against him, asked uneasily: 'Tell me, have *you* only seen bad things here, or have *you* perhaps also found some good?'

"'I don't know,' I answered, and tried to free myself. But he would not let me go and whispered in my ear: 'And will *you* come back or not?'

"Madame Vyrubova and the Grand Duchess came out of the bedroom in their outdoor clothes. They went up to Rasputin and held up their faces to him, saying, '*Au revoir*, Father.'

"'Farewell, farewell,' said Rasputin, making the sign of the cross over them both and kissing them. Madame Vyrubova took his hand, pressed it with a low moan to her hot face, and kissed it with boundless devotion. Her eyes sparkled with an unnatural light and her whole body trembled.

* * * * *

"I took advantage of an ungarded moment and slipped through the kitchen to the back landing. Slowly, absorbed in amazed reflection over the events of the evening, I went down the darkening staircase. Suddenly I felt someone touch my fur coat gently and heard a woman's low voice: 'Do you come from him?'

"I turned round in surprise and, in the dim semi-darkness saw a little female figure crouching on the top step of the stairs. She stretched out her hand and held fast to my dress.

"'Why do you go to him?' she asked in a feeble, sad, meek voice.

"'I'm not quite sure myself,' I answered evasively. The stranger rose and came close up to me.

"'You do not belong to his regular circle, I know that,' she whispered urgently, and tried to see the expression of my face. Her cold, little hand slipped into my muff and clasped my fingertips. 'For Christ's sake listen to me. I shall lose my reason if I don't talk to somebody.' She pulled me down the steps, past the concierge's lodge, and out into the street. We went through a house that had a passageway through it, then along an empty lane, through a low gate, and finally halted by a house door covered with oilcloth. The unknown woman knocked loudly, the door opened, and a young girl in a white dress looked out and said something in Polish. Unresistingly I let myself be led into a room which smelt of earth, withered leaves, moss, and orange blossoms. Obviously we were in the back part of a flower-shop, for there were bowls full of half-withered rhododendrons standing about, and bits of coloured paper, heaps of moss, and baskets of flowering hyacinths lay in the corners.

"'I must tell you everything,' whispered the stranger, sitting down on a box and pulling me towards her. 'Listen to me for God's sake. You are so young, so happy—listen to me. . . .'

"Then she pulled her veil closer, and her shoulders in her thin marten fur coat shivered. She turned away without saying anything, then drew a deep breath and asked quickly: 'Are you a stranger?'

"'Yes, I do not live in St. Petersburg.'

"'I, too, came from distant parts, and now I do not know what is to happen, what will become of my life. Why ever did she send me to him? However could I have believed her? I am not a young girl, I am thirty-two. Why did I believe her when she said he knew everything and could discover my secret, that my sorrows would all be over if only I spoke to him?'

She bent forward quickly and asked in a whisper: 'Did he send you to Holy Communion?'

"I nodded.

"'And did you go?'

"'No.'

"The stranger turned as if tortured with pain. 'Ah, you were

clever. But I? I was always religious, I believed in God and Christ. Why did I seek salvation in him?’

“Crouched forward, she whispered thickly through her veil: ‘Did he also tell you to go to Holy Communion, and then come back to him, cleansed from all sin, and with the body of the Lord in you? I did it, and visited him in the evening after the Holy Sacrament, as he ordered. But Christ did not protect me, probably because I sought Him in a wrong way.’

“She stopped and breathed heavily. Drops of water were falling softly from somewhere, and behind the dull leaves of a sad wintry palm a tiny lamp burned dimly; there was a grave-like smell of earth and hyacinths. . . .

“‘No, no, I must tell you everything. I went to him out of curiosity, impudent and vulgar curiosity, with the body of the Lord in me. And he winked shamelessly at me, as if he were asking whether I knew what he wanted from me. He was waiting for me alone in his best clothes, seized me, pulled me into the bedroom, and tore off my dress as we went. I felt his hot, burning breath on my neck. Do you know the corner near the window in which an ikon hangs? He forced me to kneel down there and whispered in my ear: “Let us pray.” He stood behind me and began to bow, saying: “Saint Simeon of Verkhoture, have mercy on my sins.”’

“‘Then he asked me, gnashing his teeth: “Did you go to Holy Communion as I ordered you?” The next moment he was nothing but savage, animal desire. . . . And I did not kill him, I did not spit in his face! The last thing I remember is his tearing off my underclothing, then I lost consciousness. . . . I awoke and found myself lying on the ground torn and defiled. He stood over me shamelessly naked. When he saw that I had opened my eyes he said with the laugh you know, a word—I will not repeat it. He bent over me, lifted me up, and laid me on the bed, saying, “But do not sleep, for Christ’s sake.” Christ, he actually dared to say His name at that moment. I don’t know now how it happened, but I began to howl and shriek and strike out at him.

“‘Someone came running up, they dressed me, pushed me down the stairs and into a droshky. The driver drove about for a

long time and at last asked where he was to take me to. I did not know, I had forgotten. We stopped near a lamp. An officer who was passing spoke to me, took his place beside me, and told the driver to go on. Then I again remember no more. . . .

“Next day when I woke it was evening, I was lying on a strange bed. He had not touched me, he gave me tea, gave me time to wash, and got a bath ready. Now I wander round and think: “Where now? What is to happen?” For I believed in Christ—do I still believe in Him? I do not know, and I come to Rasputin’s home every day to ask him why he did it to me. Why did he defile and destroy the holiest in me? I had taken the body of the Lord before I went to him. Now I do not know what to do, I cannot go away, and day after day I wander helplessly through the town. . . .’

“After she had finished her story I did my best to calm and comfort her, and at last succeeded to some extent. Then I said good-bye and went home, still stupefied by all I had seen and heard that night.

“I left St. Petersburg next morning and went back to my home. I did not see Rasputin again for two years. . . .”

CHAPTER XI

THE DANCING STARETS

NOTHING made Rasputin so happy as dancing. It was to him the most perfect expression of his inner life, as important as breathing, eating, drinking, or any other elemental human activity. Everything for which the speech of the muzhik was inadequate, his emotions, impulses, and intuitions, received in the dance their most powerful and liberating form, and the movements of the dancer expressed the incomprehensible yearning for the infinite, the immemorial melancholy, as well as the exultant, primitive joy of the creature in being alive.

Among the Russian peasants the dance is not yet degraded to a form of social entertainment; it has remained a rite of primitive religious activity, which in many respects assumes the character of prayer. Whenever his courage threatens to fail, the Siberian peasant begins either to pray or to dance. No special hour and no special occasion are necessary for either the one form of religious ecstasy or the other. The songs, too, to which he dances, are not uncommonly church hymns; but even the melancholy or childishly exultant folk-songs have always something solemn and devotional about them: the Slav song is often a chanted prayer, the dance of the Russian peasant an expression of humble piety.

When Rasputin, in his Siberian village, in the course of a sermon on the redemption of man from sin, suddenly jumped up, stamped with his feet on the floor, and began to dance, his village disciples saw nothing strange in this, and certainly nothing inconsistent with his dignity: the "dancing starets," the saint who preached and then, when words were no longer adequate, continued his sermon in dance, was a comprehensible and natural phenomenon, nothing more than the spontaneous cry of

joy at a happy event, or the wail of lament at an unexpected grief.

In the Siberian "izbas," the cabins where men and women, old and young, sat together on rough benches round a long table, it happened every day that one or another of them, seized by an inexplicable emotion, suddenly sprang up from the bench and began to dance in the middle of the room, either alone or with others, overcome at the same time by a like feeling. As soon as their excitement had died away in the dance they would return quietly to their places, and none of those present would be in the least surprised at this sudden outburst.

Rasputin retained all his home customs almost unchanged in the capital, and, as he sat at breakfast surrounded by his women disciples, talking unctuously about God and the "mysterious resurrection," he would begin to hum softly to himself. Several voices round the table at once joined in his song, until it swelled to a loud chorus, and the starets leapt from his seat and the next moment was flying through the room as light as a feather.

For in dancing his strong figure seemed to lose all its heaviness; the artistes of the imperial ballet had more than once envied him his light and winged feet. With a swaying movement of his body he approached one of the women, and with seductive, caressing, beckoning movements of his hands invited her to join him. He circled round her, crept up to her on his toes, his dancing fingers glided along her body, and the piercing glance of his eyes fell on her now from this side, now from that. She felt his swaying body nearer and nearer to hers, and his flushed face closer and closer to her face.

Finally the woman he had invited rose slowly as in a dream. Unresistingly she followed his lure, waved her lace handkerchief in her raised hand, and began to revolve in time to the singing and the stamping boots. The ecstasy of the dancing starets and his partner communicated itself immediately to the rest of the company.

But the woman whom he had chosen for his partner and found worthy to celebrate the sacred rite of the dance, even during their whirlings had the feeling of partaking of those mystical influences of which the starets had so often preached. As the stamping

of the dancing saint became ever more passionate, fast and furious, the cheeks of his partner flamed with crimson; her eyes gradually grew dim, the eyelids grew heavier and heavier, and finally dropped. In the end Rasputin took the tottering, half-fainting woman in his great, strong peasant's arms, and carried her back to her seat. Anyone who was present at this scene for the first time might have thought that here was a satyr bearing off his fainting victim; but the women disciples saw it all as a solemn mystic rite; and they surrounded their fortunate sister and heaped tender attentions upon her; they kissed, stroked, and caressed her hair and her limbs, for the body of this "chosen one" was holy, and to them Rasputin, even in dancing, was a preacher, a saint, and a redeemer.

The men friends and followers of the starets, as well as the business men and politicians who gave drinking parties in his honour, generally provided music on these occasions and, whenever possible, a gipsy choir; for it was known that neither the finest food nor the oldest wine could make the holy man so happy and enthusiastic as song, music, and dancing. Anyone who had sung for him was sure of his goodwill and protection, and was thereafter numbered among his friends. Many a stroke of business had been carried through, and many an important appointment made, because the petitioner was the owner of a beautiful and melodious voice, which set the starets dancing.

Fat A. N. Khvostov owed his appointment as Minister of the Interior to a chance of this kind: Rasputin met him one evening at the "Villa Rode," where Khvostov, in his Chamberlain's uniform, was enjoying himself with some friends. Grigori Efimovich was not satisfied with the singing of the gipsy choir; he thought that the basses were too weak and, finally, he said to Khvostov: "Brother, go and help them to sing. *You* are fat and can make a lot of noise!"

Khvostov needed no second invitation, as he was already a little tipsy. He leapt on to the stage in full Court dress and made his thundering bass resound. Rasputin was charmed, clapped his applause, and shouted that Khvostov was a splendid fellow.

A few days later the fat Chamberlain was unexpectedly appointed Minister of the Interior, which made Purishkevich, a

deputy of the Duma, exclaim that, under the present regime, the Ministers would have to pass an examination not in political science but in gipsy music.

Rasputin loved most the gipsy choirs, those bodies of from twenty to thirty-five men and women who, in accordance with the Russian custom, placed themselves in a semicircle round the guests and, under the direction of the "precentor" or the "precentress," struck up in turn songs passionate, melancholy, or gay. This gipsy music always had a peculiarly exhilarating effect on Rasputin, and he could be enticed anywhere at any hour of the day or night by the promise of a gipsy choir. He would often carouse and dance till the early hours of the morning, listening to gipsy music; on such occasions his true nature, the goodness as well as the baseness of his soul, his melancholy as well as his joy, reached an ecstatic climax; then he was at once preacher and brawler, redeemer and debauchee.

Rasputin's favourite resort in St. Petersburg was the cabaret called the "Villa Rode." The proprietors always kept in readiness for Rasputin's parties a little annex somewhat apart from the main building, where they could amuse themselves as they liked, unperceived by the rest of the guests, and where it was possible to keep a careful surveillance over all those present.

The starets' visits were announced beforehand by telephone, so that, when he arrived with his following, he found the table decorated with flowers and spread with attractive dishes, especially the fish and sweetmeats of which he was so fond. In one corner of the room the gipsy choir stood in readiness, and the waiters had provided an ample supply of Madeira. Rasputin sat down with a motley company the like of which could have been found nowhere else in the world. The starets himself, in a Russian shirt of cornflower blue or bright-red silk, drank steadily, clapped his hands in time to the gipsy singing, or jumped up and danced, immediately afterwards tossing down greedily a few glasses of wine. Suddenly he would quote scripture, or turn to one or another of the guests, look at him with dull, drunken eyes, and say: "Do *you* know what *you* are thinking of, my friend? I know." On these occasions he was hardly ever wrong;

it was as if the wine and the gipsy music had heightened his instinctive faculties to clairvoyance.

Often again, he would gaze into vacancy, as if some distant picture held him in a spell, and then he would tell in a melancholy tone of Siberia, his little village, his farm, and the scented flowers on the banks of the Tura. In a kind of amorous rapture he recalled the horses in his stable at Pokrovskoe, which he had not seen for so long. Suddenly he began to give an unseemly description of the sexual life of horses, as he had observed it as a child in his father's stable. With a coarse air he pulled one of the distinguished ladies towards him and whispered roughly, threateningly, "Come, my lovely mare." Then he fell to praising again the beauty of the steppes and the dignity and value of farm work, and held up his rough, horny hands for all the company to see. In a proud voice, not without arrogance, he cried: "Look at my hands. Their horniness comes from hard work!"

Frequently he would turn provocatively to one of the fine gentlemen with diamonds in his shirt-front, or to one of the society ladies in a very décolleté dress, saying: "Yes, yes, my dears, I know you, I can read your souls. You are all much too pampered and also much too artful. These fine clothes and arts of yours are useless and pernicious. Men must learn to humble themselves! You must be simpler, far, far simpler, only then will God come nearer to you. Follow me in summer to Pokrovskoe, to the great freedom of Siberia. We will catch fish and work in the fields, and then you will really learn to understand God."

The drunken peasant must have made a curious impression upon the distinguished ladies and gentlemen as, sitting at a table covered with heavy silver and delicate china, he waved his coarse, knotted hands in the air and proclaimed, amid his ceaseless potations, that farm work and fishing were pleasing in the sight of God.

Still another peculiarity of the starets must have struck the guests as singular: he had a habit, while he drank, sang, and danced, of distributing to the ladies he wished to please, and also to the gipsy singers, the servants and waitresses, little notes, on

which he had written extremely naïve, banal, and generally muddled maxims like: "Go not from the way of love, for love is your mother," or "I gladden you with the light of love, and I live thereby. God send your soul humility and the joy of beneficent love."

On one occasion, as he was handing a maxim of this kind to a lady, he noticed that her maid was watching him. He immediately composed a note for her, which read: "God loves work and your honesty is known to all."

Simple though those "wise sayings" of the starets, inspired by wine and song, might be, his female admirers found a profound hidden meaning in every one of them. The elegant ladies preserved these hardly decipherable "love letters" of Rasputin's in costly caskets, and the maidservants hid them in their bosoms beneath their bodices, and took them out every day to kiss them fervently; the more obscure their meaning, the more precious these strange notes seemed to Rasputin's female admirers.

The ecstasy of the holy man, however, did not always exhaust itself in harmless quotations from the Bible, sermons on the joys of the stable, or these naïve and nonsensical scribblings: his elevated mood often rose to a real Siberian drunkenness, to a wild transport of joy, or an outburst of desperate, raving madness.

More than once a banquet that had begun quite peacefully degenerated into an orgy of debauchery, and Grigori Efimovich would lose all control, and finally cause a terrible public scandal. Every occurrence of this kind was exaggerated and broadcast everywhere by the enemies of the starets, for in society, as well as in Court circles, in the Government, and the Duma, there were influential groups to whom every opportunity to attack Rasputin was most welcome.

The imperial couple, on the contrary, were painfully affected by every disagreeable rumour connected with him, especially as attacks on Rasputin were always at bottom directed against the Tsar and the Tsaritsa. The result was that the few people who had access to the imperial couple tried to prevent any scandal from coming to their ears. Careful precautions were also taken, especially while Beletski was Director of Police, to restrict as

far as possible expeditions of Rasputin's likely to have serious consequences, and to persuade the starets himself not to hold his parties in public places of entertainment. As these efforts were not always successful, and Grigori Efimovich even took a particular pleasure in evading the surveillance of the police, the authorities had arranged that secluded rooms, from which not so much as a sound could penetrate to the public, should be assigned to him in his favourite restaurants. However, it was sometimes impossible to avoid a fracas, when Grigori Efimovich, after singing and dancing with the gipsies, staggered about the corridors in a state of extreme intoxication.

While the dignitaries devoted to the Tsar did everything to avoid scandal, other persons and authorities, hostile to the starets, left no stone unturned deliberately to cause such scandals and exploit the public indignation for their own ends. More than once drinking parties were arranged in the "Villa Rode" or the "Donon" in St. Petersburg, or in the "Yar" in Moscow, for the sole purpose of rousing public anger and compromising the starets. It was well known that Rasputin, who, in a sober state, kept a fair check on his utterances, became garrulous when drinking and listening to the gipsies.

On these occasions he would sometimes reveal the intimacies of Tsarskoe Selo, proclaim that the Tsaritsa Alexandrovna Fedorovna was a "second Katharine," and that it was she, not the good-natured, honest weakling, Nikolai, who really ruled Russia. When he was tipsy Rasputin was easily persuaded to talk to ministers on the telephone in the presence of his boon companions, and, in this way, to make indiscreet statements. Every word that the naïve and intoxicated Rasputin uttered in this irresponsible state, suitably embellished, was next day broadcast by his enemies all over the capital. This mean trick of making a man drunk and then exposing his indiscreet remarks, for a long time had not the success desired by its promoters: the Tsaritsa, and even the Tsar, who were both well aware of the primitive and simple good nature of their Grigori Efimovich, refused to believe the gossip, however circumstantial, about Rasputin's alleged insulting remarks against the imperial house. They were faithful to their friend, although his enemies saw to it that

Accuse

these artificially arranged scandals should not come to an end.

Thus on one occasion a serious collision occurred in the "Villa Rode" between the starets and Obrasov, a young officer in the Guards, which ended in Obrasov's boxing Rasputin's ears. As a result of this the police closed the "Villa Rode" for some time in order to prevent the repetition of such incidents. Of course, a detailed report was immediately drawn up and sent to the Tsar; he, however, put it aside unread.

Even on his journeys to Pokrovskoe the starets was dogged by spies, who gave detailed accounts of all he did and left undone in his home, and often enough contrived to make great scandals out of quite harmless incidents.

Thus on June 24th, 1915, the spies reported as follows: "Rasputin had a number of visitors to-day in his house at Pokrovskoe. He was drunk, put on the gramophone, danced, and then told his admirers that he had enabled three hundred Baptists to escape punishment, and should have been paid a thousand roubles by each of them; he had, in fact, received only five thousand roubles altogether. He also boasted that it was he who, during his last visit to the Tsar, secured the postponement of the calling up of the older reservists until after the harvest."

An incident that took place on the steamer between Tiumen and Pokrovskoe served as the pretext for a violent attack by his enemies. While the starets was going to his village accompanied by his friend, the Abbot Martian from the monastery of Tiumen, he made friends with some newly called-up soldiers, imbibed too freely, and finally caused a riotous scene.

The secret agents gave a full account of all that happened:

"9th August. Rasputin, on leaving the monastery, went on board the steamer, which left for Pokrovskoe at 11 o'clock. About 1 p. m. he left his cabin in a drunken condition and went up to some soldiers going to Tobolsk. He began to talk to them, gave them twenty-five roubles, ordered them to sing, and then went back to his cabin; a few minutes later, however, he appeared on deck again and gave the soldiers a further hundred roubles. The singing was then resumed, Rasputin joining in. About 1 o'clock he conducted all the ten soldiers to the second

class, bade them be seated, and wanted to treat them to lunch; the captain, however, forbade this.

"After some time Rasputin came on deck again, told the soldiers to form a circle, placed himself in the middle, and sang songs with them. He was in excellent spirits, gave the soldiers another twenty-five roubles, and betook himself to his cabin again.

"He came back in twenty minutes drunker than ever, went to the third class, and began a dispute with a man from Tiumen; he then got involved in a discussion with a merchant, Mikhalev, also belonging to Tiumen, and began to express himself unfavourably about the activities of the Bishop of Tobolsk. Later meeting the waiter, he insulted him, called him a rascal, and accused him of stealing three thousand roubles from him.

"After this incident Rasputin returned to his cabin, remained standing by the open window, laid his head on the table, and let the passengers stare at him. Hostile cries were heard from the crowd, such as: 'Cut his beard off! Shave him!' At the request of the detectives the cabin window was closed; two hours later Rasputin fell down and lay in a drunken stupor until the steamer arrived at Pokrovskoe. The detectives asked the captain to let them have a few sailors to help take Rasputin ashore. Four men dragged the drunkard on to the landing stage, where his daughters met him, put him in a cart, and took him home."

"10th August. At ten A. M. Rasputin came out of his house and questioned the detectives about what had happened the previous day. He said he was astounded that he had become insensible so quickly, as he had only drunk three bottles of wine."

The starets' enemies magnified this comparatively harmless occurrence into a tremendous affair, about which a mountain of documents was compiled. The police drew up a report, and sent it to the Governor, Stankevich; the Governor passed the document on to Prince Shcherbatov, then Minister of the Interior, and he referred it to A. A. Khvostov, the Minister of Justice. The last declared that the matter was outside his competence, and that it belonged to the Ministry of the Interior. Prince Shcherbatov, who was obviously at a loss what to do, submitted it to Goremykin, the Prime Minister, and from him it passed

to A. N. Khvostov, the new Minister of the Interior. Finally Anna Vyrubova and Beletski succeeded in hushing up the whole affair, as well as the scandalous happenings at the Yar Restaurant at Moscow which had taken place in the interval.

This new affair had looked very threatening for Rasputin, and the greatest skill was required to prevent unpleasant complications. In the autumn of 1915 Rasputin went to Moscow to pray at the tomb of the Patriarch Hermogen, and a number of pretended friends invited him to the Yar Restaurant. Among those present were some journalists, who were expressly brought in as witnesses of the expected scandal, as well as several young ladies from the highest social circles.

Supper began about midnight, wine flowed abundantly, and an orchestra excited the starets to dance. Heated with wine Rasputin began to talk about his influence, his popularity, and his amorous adventures in St. Petersburg; in this connection he also dropped some remarks about the imperial couple which, however harmless in intention they may have been, were at once used against him by his enemies. He said that the Tsaritsa called him "Christ" and followed all his advice blindly; that he had often had to help her out of difficulties, and that the imperial apartments were always open to him.

After supper a chorus of women appeared, and Rasputin, as usual, immediately entered into conversation with the girls. He told them, too, of his friendly relations with the royal family, and took off and showed them his waistcoat, embroidered with flowers by the Empress's own hands.

At this moment, doubtless, recollections of the orgies of the "people of God" invaded his wine-clouded mind, for he did not stop at his waistcoat but, before anyone could prevent him, he had thrown off his clothes and, standing stark naked in the middle of the room, sang hymns and danced.

Meanwhile, the police authorities had been informed, and the Prefect, Adrianov, appeared in person. Next day this terrible scandal was being discussed all over Russia, and no time was lost in submitting an exact account to the Tsar.

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Rasputin's trips to Moscow were nearly always marked by

some great nocturnal entertainment, which more than once threatened to take a dangerous turn, for Moscow was the real centre of the intrigues and plots against the imperial couple and their favourite.

Grigori Efimovich was very fond of taking one of his new women disciples with him to these entertainments, so that we have two lively descriptions of the starets' carousals from such novices, in which the strange figure of the "dancing starets" stands out most vividly. In Moscow it was Elena Dianumova who was allowed to accompany Rasputin.

"The telephone bell rang," she narrates. "I heard a familiar singing voice. 'Good-morning, Frantik, good-day, my darling, I have come to Moscow to *you*, and am speaking from the station. From there I am going to the Reshetnikovs'; come there to lunch. I want to see *you*, I am longing for *you*.'"

"Naturally I was very curious to meet Rasputin again; Madame Reshetnikov worshipped all clerical celebrities and, whenever any one of them was in Moscow, he stayed with her. She had been enthusiastic over John of Kronstadt, Ilidor, and Varnava, besides Rasputin.

"About one o'clock I called at her flat; a monk received me at the door, and two saintly ladies dressed in black were sitting in the waiting-room. I requested that Rasputin should be informed of my arrival; but at that moment he appeared in the doorway, and began to embrace me and kiss me in his customary way. He looked ill; his face had become long and narrow and traversed with deep wrinkles; but the eyes were unchanged, and gazed at me as penetratingly as ever.

"He took me to a room with heavy old furniture; a monk came in at the same time. It was Varnava, as I learned later. He made the sign of the cross over me, asked my name, and said: '*You* are called Elena? Then *you* had *your* name-day recently. Make an offering to my church, a carpet or something of the kind.'

"Rasputin listened to this conversation disapprovingly and cried suddenly: 'Frantik, come with me to the dining-room; they are expecting us there.'

"We went to the adjoining room, where an old lady of about eighty was sitting behind a table, surrounded by other equally

old ladies. One of them, by whom I took my place, was Varnava's sister; opposite me sat a young officer, a Grusian, who had been detailed to watch over Rasputin. Next to Varnava sat a merchant's wife, a young woman, with big diamonds in her ears; she gazed amorously at him all the time, and laughed loudly at his jokes. Rasputin himself was silent, while Varnava talked incessantly.

"Towards the end of the meal Rasputin turned to me: 'I shall come to supper with *you*, and bring him with me,' he said, pointing to the officer. The ladies protested: 'Little father Grigori Efimovich, *you* are like the sun in the clouds! Hardly have *you* appeared when *you* vanish again. We have not seen *you* properly yet.'

"'No,' replied Rasputin, 'I will return to you. Now I must go to my Frantik.'

"'You have only to show him a beautiful woman,' remarked Varnava maliciously, 'and you will see no more of him.' These words annoyed Rasputin very much, and he threw an angry glance at Varnava.

"In the ante-room Grigori Efimovich said to me: 'Did *you* hear Varnava's remark? He is jealous of me. I don't like that sly dog.'

"I hurried home as fast as I could, bought food and Madeira at Eliseev's, ordered fish dishes from a restaurant, and rang up a few of my acquaintances to ask if they would like to see Rasputin. About seven o'clock he turned up with his aide-de-camp. He was very gay, joked incessantly, his conversation as usual jumping from one subject to another, and he often indulged in incomprehensible allusions. He studied everyone present attentively, and his eyes seemed to bore through them. He treated Varnava particularly sharply, and said to me: 'It is nice at *your* house, here my soul is glad. *You* have no secret designs, and so I love *you*. But he, did *you* hear him? He does not love me, oh, how little he loves me.'

"His gaze remained fixed for some time on Mr. E. and his wife. This Mr. E. had once been engaged to me; but no one knew about it; we had both married since, and were very happy in our marriages. Nevertheless, Rasputin suddenly said to me,

indicating Mr. E.: 'You once loved each other, but nothing came of it. It is better so, for you do not suit each other and his present wife is the right one for him.'

"I was amazed at his wonderful clairvoyance, for it could hardly have been possible for him to have heard anything about our engagement, which we ourselves had almost forgotten.

"When supper was over Rasputin all at once asked me to send for the gipsies, and would not be put off. Mr. E., noting my awkward situation, proposed that we should go to the gipsies instead, to which Rasputin agreed. The party broke up at once, and transferred itself to the Yar Restaurant.

"There Rasputin was at once recognized, and the proprietor, fearing a scandal such as had already occurred there, immediately communicated with the Prefect, who dispatched two officials to the restaurant. They arrived in the shortest possible time, came to our room, and asked to be allowed to remain, on the ground that they had to protect Rasputin against possible attacks; soon afterwards several police officers in plain clothes appeared with the same object.

"Meanwhile the gipsy choir with the famous singer, Nastia Polakova, had come on the stage; Rasputin began to feel happy and ordered fruit, coffee, cakes, and champagne.

"It was incredible how much Rasputin could drink. Anybody else would rapidly have fallen down insensible, but with him the only signs were that his eyes grew brighter, his face paler, and his wrinkles deeper.

" 'Now then,' he shouted suddenly, 'begin to sing, children!' Behind the screen which cut off our room two guitars began to twang and the voices of the gipsy girls were heard; Rasputin sat in silence and listened with bowed head. 'Nastia,' he declared at the end, '*you* sing so beautifully that it grips the heart.'

"Then all at once he jumped up and joined in the singing in his full, clear voice. 'And now, Nastia,' he called, 'we'll drink a glass. I love gipsy songs, and when I hear them my heart exults with joy.'

"Nastia gave him curt, unfriendly answers, and looked at him darkly. That struck me very much, and I asked one of the party why the gipsies were hostile to Rasputin; in reply I was told

that there had been a great scandal during one of the starets' recent visits, which had had most unpleasant consequences for the choir.

"I felt an involuntary twinge of fear lest there should again be painful scenes, and I regretted having visited a public place of entertainment in Rasputin's company. I thought of getting up and going away quietly, but somehow I was already infected by the general atmosphere and stayed.

"Now sing my favourite song, the 'Troika,'" cried Rasputin, jumping up. He was pale, and stood before us with half-shut eyes; with his hair falling over his forehead he began to beat time with both hands: 'I go, I go to her, to my love.'

"His voice was full of fire and passion, and his tones stamped themselves deeply on my memory. What elemental strength lay hidden in this man!

"Our party had meanwhile noticeably increased: every moment acquaintances were rung up and asked to come along; and other guests in the restaurant came up and asked to be allowed to join us. When the rich factory-owner, K., and his wife learned that I was there, they begged me to introduce them to the starets; some Englishwomen who had come to Russia with a military mission implored to be allowed to see Rasputin; when they had received permission they sat down quietly in a corner, and after that never once took their eyes off him. When our number had swelled to about thirty someone proposed that we should go to the 'Strelna,' so we set out. One of the party wanted to pay the bill; but the waiter replied that the Prefect's officers had already arranged everything.

"At the 'Strelna' a big, reserved room was assigned to us, the windows of which looked out on the Winter Garden. The public soon discovered that Rasputin was with our party and people climbed up the palm trees in the Winter Garden in order to look in at the windows. The wine was flowing freely at our table, and Rasputin also ordered a number of bottles of champagne for the choir.

"The gipsies paid their reckoning with a great song of praise: 'We drink to the health of dear Grisha.' They gradually got

ning, and I had no clear idea of what had taken place. Then the car flew off as fast as the wind, shots and shrieks still ringing in my ears.

"Naturally, we were all very much agitated. Rasputin was the first to recover his composure and remarked thoughtfully: 'My enemies do not love me.' Then he relapsed into a heavy silence.

"We were driven to Mr. E.'s flat, where we learned that the officers had been arrested, and had confessed that they had intended to attack and maltreat Rasputin.

"Rasputin's face had, in the interval, become quite yellow, either through agitation or alcohol, and he looked several years older. Soon an unexpected episode occurred with the wife of K., the Factory-owner, who had asked the starets why he did not drive the Jews out of Russia.

"'You should be ashamed to talk like that,' Rasputin rebuked her. 'The Jews are as good people as we are. I am sure that each of you knows an honest Jew, even if he is only a dentist!'

"Then he explained to Mrs. K. that he must speak to her, and left the room with her for a quarter of an hour. When they returned Mrs. K. said in a changed voice: 'How clever you are. I never thought to have to do with such an intelligent man. I took you for an adventurer!'

"Rasputin looked at her with a sad air, and said, 'I would rather have been maltreated by the officers than have had to listen to such words from a woman's mouth.'

"At this point the aide-de-camp joined in the conversation and began to defend Rasputin, whereupon the lady burst into tears, said that they were insulting a helpless woman, and departed.

"Shortly after this I also withdrew and sought my own flat, which was not far away. I fell on the divan half-dead, and was immediately asleep; but an hour later I was roused by the persistent ringing of the telephone. It was the Grusian officer, asking if Rasputin was by any chance with me. He told me that they had put the starets to sleep on the sofa in the little room, but that he had suddenly gone out. After this the telephone rang every moment and ever new people inquired about Rasputin's whereabouts. According to the statement of the Grusian, the police

were already alarmed, and search parties were looking for Grigori Efimovich all over the town.

"About one o'clock my flat bell rang, and I heard Rasputin's voice in the hall asking if I were ready to go out.

" 'Where have *you* been?' I asked through the door. 'They're searching all Moscow for *you*, and the whole of the police have turned out!'

"He laughed and said: 'Isn't it all the same to *you* where I've been? I have brought a new lady with me; if *you* wish I will introduce *you* to her. She is good.'

"I was not yet dressed, and I flatly refused to receive a strange lady, whereupon she said good-bye to Rasputin, and went away. So that I was unable to learn where he had spent the rest of the night.

"I rang up the aide-de-camp and told him that Rasputin had turned up at my flat, and he hurried round immediately. Then we all three went off to see the wife of General K., in whose elegant drawing-room a large company was assembled. On our appearance the doors of a beautiful dining-room were opened, and we were invited to lunch at a richly spread table, with flowers, porcelain, and old silver. The ladies wore thin spring dresses. One place was empty, as a Polish countess was expected, who wished to make Rasputin's acquaintance.

"Finally this lady arrived wearing a grey dress and a heavy string of pearls about her neck. Rasputin went to meet her, and looked at her keenly in his usual manner, at which she swayed, began to tremble, and had to be led away to a bedroom. As it was announced during lunch that the Countess felt better, Rasputin went up to her, stroked her, and spoke soothingly to her. But the lady immediately had a new attack and cried that she could not face those eyes that looked into the very depths of the soul.

"When Rasputin returned to the rest of the party the ladies begged for an autographed photograph; but he declared that he did not possess a single likeness of himself. I remembered an acquaintance of mine who had recently opened a photographic studio, so I rang him up, and told him I was bringing the starets to him.

"Accompanied by the aide-de-camp we then betook ourselves to the studio, where I was at once struck by the unusually large number of women assistants; later I learned that these were ladies who wished to see Rasputin under this disguise.

"My friend made several exposures, and Rasputin insisted on being photographed with me: 'I want to be in a picture with *you*, Frantik,' he declared. I had foreseen this and given the necessary instructions to the photographer, so that he only pretended to take us without putting a plate in the camera.

"On our way back from the studio, Rasputin sat down beside me and began to speak very cordially: 'I annoyed *you* in St. Petersburg,' he said, 'forgive me. I spoke badly to *you*; but I am only a simple peasant, and what is in my heart comes at once to my tongue.'

"He took off his hat and let his hair wave in the wind. 'May God punish me,' he cried, crossing himself, 'if *you* ever hear another evil word from me. *You* are better than all others, for *you* are a simple nature. Tell me if *you* have any wish and I will do everything for *you*.'

"As I remained silent and refused to speak of my case at that moment, he said: 'Perhaps *you* need money? Would *you* like a million? I am about to transact a big affair for which I shall get a lot of money.'

"'But I do not require any money from *you*, Grigori Efimovich,' I remarked with a smile.

"'As *you* think best; but I should be happy to be able to do something for *you*. *You* are a good creature, Frantik, and my soul is at peace in *your* company.'

"When we returned to the General's wife, two of the Prefect's officers were waiting for us. Rasputin kissed all those present, begged me to come back to St. Petersburg, and then went off to the station, accompanied by the two officials, whence he started at once for the capital."

* * * * *

Vera Alexandrovna Shukovskaia accompanied the starets to one of these parties in St. Petersburg; her description gives a good idea of their strange atmosphere, in which drunken orgies were mixed up with grave decisions of high clerical policy:

Frantik
is the
beginning
of
his
obsession
w
Irene
Yasopova

" 'Come with me to-night, we'll dance and drink,' Rasputin said to me one day.

" 'Where?' I asked.

" 'At the house of my friends. Do *you* consent? It will be very jolly.'

" 'All right,' I said. 'I'll come.'

" 'That's splendid,' he cried joyfully. 'Come about six o'clock.'

"When I went back to his house I found him in the waiting-room surrounded by four men and a lady; they were obviously Caucasians. Rasputin himself was ready to go out. . . . They were all talking promiscuously in loud voices, and I could not quite understand what it was all about. The words 'concession' and 'stock exchange' occurred several times, and pressure was to be put on certain people. Rasputin deprecated this, gesticulating with hands and walking-stick, and murmured his eternal 'All right, I'll do it, come to-morrow, I have no time now.'

" 'Ah, darling, *you* have kept your word and have come, thank *you*.' He took my arm and went down the stairs with me. When we reached the street I saw an elegant motor-car waiting for us. The chauffeur, a soldier, gave Rasputin a military salute; we got in quickly and drove off.

"In a little while the car stopped before a high house.

" 'It should be here,' said Rasputin. 'Darling, ask the porter if the P.'s live here.'

"I looked at him in amazement: 'But you said they were friends of yours, and you do not even know where they live?'

"The porter hurried up, and led us to the second floor, where he rang the bell. The door was opened by a fat little woman who shouted with joy at the sight of us. 'Father, dear Father,' she cried, and embraced Rasputin. In the hall a tall, thin man came up and welcomed the starets, and finally we reached the dining-room which, it seemed, also served as a reception-room, for, in addition to the richly spread dining-table, sofas tastelessly upholstered in gaudy red plush were ranged along the walls. They were occupied by several young men of indeterminate appearance, who rose respectfully as we came in.

"The hostess winked slyly at me and, turning to Rasputin, said: '*You've* got a new sweetheart, I see.'

"Grigori Efimovich laughed heartily, flung his arm round me, and said gaily: 'One does not interfere with another! Oh, how frightfully I love this one!' With these words he drew me on to the sofa, pulled the table in front of me, and said, still laughing: 'Now *you* will not run away from me!'

"Suddenly I heard a soft, singing voice: 'Christ bless you!' I looked round; in the corner, under the ikons, a little old man in a coarse pilgrim's garment was kneeling.

" 'Ah, Vassia,' cried Rasputin to him. 'How are you?' The little man made no answer.

"Rasputin muttered something to himself: the host appeared in the doorway with bottles of wine in his hands, placed them on the table, and said: 'Be good enough, dear Father, to drink this port until *your* favourite wine arrives.'

" 'Give me some,' muttered Rasputin, and pushed forward his glass. Then he took a gulp and handed the glass to me: 'Drink, my darling,' said he. 'People may say it is a sin as much as they like; to hell with sin!' And he emptied one glass after another.

" 'The cursed rascals,' he broke out suddenly, 'are always wanting something; but they do not understand what is the chief thing.' He had another drink.

" 'And what is the chief thing?' I inquired.

"Rasputin bent over me: 'The Church should know that,' he whispered, blinking at me slyly.

" 'The Church? That should mean the Synod?' I asked teasingly.

" 'Well, *you* have made a fine discovery! The devil take *your* Synod! If only it weren't for this war, God Almighty, one could do everything! Drink,' he cried, and poured some wine into my mouth by force. 'Drink, *you* can drink splendidly. Come here,' he called to the young men. 'Everybody is to get tipsy with me. Come!'

"The whole company came up and looked greedily at the wine glasses. At this moment the host came in and brought two other bottles, Madeira this time, Rasputin's favourite wine. At the same moment the hostess also appeared with a big dish of fried bream.

"That is good," cried Rasputin delightedly, and began to eat. He ate the fish with his hands, put big lumps on my plate, and stroked me with half-wiped, greasy fingers.

"The host sat down opposite Rasputin, and seized an unoccupied moment to ask: 'When do *you* intend to visit Pitirim in the Caucasus?'

"I am going at Easter, at Easter," answered Rasputin quickly, and drank a glass of wine. 'Pitirim is a good fellow who will find his way about. There is brawling and strife on his account now. Pitirim belongs to us.'

"He is a sly fox, however, you have to be careful," rejoined the host. 'Pitirim will be stricter with the Consistory.'

"Rasputin would not listen, clapped him on the shoulder, and cried: 'Ho! Music! Look alive! Where is the champagne? Fall to . . .'

"In the twinkling of an eye two balalaika players appeared. At the first notes of a real Russian dancing song Rasputin leapt into the middle of the room.

"Drink to the last drop,
Only lose not your head!"

sang Rasputin. 'Drink, my little bee.' He tossed the wine down at a gulp, flung his glass on to the floor, and whirled round the room in a wild dance, cheering and shouting. That was a dance! In his mauve silk shirt, with a red girdle round his waist, and in high, polished boots, drunk and happy, he danced in rapturous transport, shrieking wildly.

"The uproar, clinking of glasses, and the strains of the instruments made me giddy; everything whirled madly before my eyes. Rasputin shoved aside everything that came in his way, and in a twinkling the middle of the room was empty. Then he seized me, pulled me over the table into the middle of the room, and cried: 'Dance!' Carried away by his fierceness, I whirled with him; the dance became more and more boisterous, until at last I dropped into a chair, almost fainting. I saw Rasputin's flushed face as in a mist. Whistling and stamping he struck into the song:

“ ‘Lady, lady, gracious lady,
Give me your little hands!’

Then he sat down on the sofa breathing heavily.

“ ‘Well, I’ve danced my fill this time,’ he said; ‘but it is not to be compared with our dancing in Siberia. All day we fell trees, such trees. Three men could not get their arms round them. And when evening comes we make a fire in the snow and sing and dance till midnight. That’s a life for you, I tell you.’

“ ‘The room was unbearably hot. One of the half-drunken youths was sitting on the floor, the others were still playing on their instruments. Suddenly Rasputin thumped on the table again and pointed to his empty glass; it was at once refilled. As he drank the host asked him humbly: ‘What is your view about the Church Assembly? When will it be convoked?’

“ ‘Rasputin stared at him, and mumbled thickly: ‘*You* see, the war . . . as soon as we are free. We are always ready, Russia will not remain without Patriarchs. Only we must send the war to the devil.’

“ ‘What about the Consistory?’

“ ‘He would not leave Rasputin in peace; but the latter jumped up again and clapped his hands, crying: ‘The devil take the Consistory!’

“ ‘Lady, lady, gracious lady . . .

And as for Pitirim, the son of a dog, we’ll make him Metropolitan!’

“ ‘The youth sitting on the floor crawled on all fours behind the wildly dancing Rasputin: the strings clanged; like a madman Grigori Efimovich whirled round the room. His greedy eyes stared at me: ‘To-day *you* will not run away from me; *you* must stay with me.

“ ‘Lady, lady, gracious lady . . .

Synod, Pitirim, to the devil!’

“ ‘At the door I tore myself free. I said I would come back immediately. In the hall I found my furs with difficulty and agitation and departed hastily. Behind me echoed the sound of the song and Rasputin’s words: ‘Pitirim, the dog, shall be Metropolitan!’”