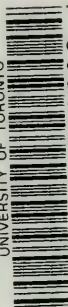



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*The Memoirs of Alexander Iswolsky*









M. ISWOLSKY.

*Iswołskij, Alexander Polnowit*

# *The Memoirs of Alexander Iswołsky :: Formerly Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador to France*

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*Edited and Translated*  
By  
CHARLES LOUIS SEEGER



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# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I.—RUSSIA'S POLITICAL SITUATION, 1905-1906 .	19 ✓
II.—THE SECRET TREATY OF BJORKOE . . . . .	40 ✓
III.—THE FIRST DOUMA . . . . .	84
IV.—COUNT WITTE . . . . .	113
V.—THE PROVINCIAL NOBILITY . . . . .	143 ✓
VI.—THE GOREMYKINE CABINET . . . . .	168
VII.—M. STOLYPINE AND THE CADETS. . . . .	199
VIII.—TERRORISM . . . . .	219
IX.—THE EMPEROR NICHOLAS II. . . . .	243



## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THIS is but a fragment of the work that the author had planned, covering the period of his activities as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1906-1910) and Ambassador to France (1910-1917.) It was to consist of three volumes, the first treating of the events following the granting of a constitutional charter to Russia; the second revealing many unpublished details of the negotiations between Russia and Austria in relation to the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ensuing formation of the Triple Entente. The third was to deal with the Balkan Wars and finally the Great War and the causes which led to it.

The year of illness and anxiety for the future of his beloved country, preceding his death in August last, interfered with his literary work and prevented the completion of even the first volume. The consequent loss to history is difficult to estimate, but a careful reading of these memoirs, as far as they go, will give some measure of what that loss means, for every page testifies to the honesty, exactitude and insight with which he records the important events and portrays the characters of the men who figured in them, during the period covered by these few chapters.

The great value of M. Iswolsky's book is due not only to his having been one of the most prominent and effective statesmen concerned in European political affairs



for twelve years prior to the collapse of the Russian Empire, but even more to his innate sense of truth, which never allows him to alter or conceal a fact for the purpose of strengthening an argument. He states only what he knows, and if he mentions a rumour he calls it that, plainly. He combined in a rare degree the qualities of a man of action and a critic. This enabled him to tell of events in which he took part with the penetration of a keen observer, added to a personal knowledge of details which even the most intelligent looker-on must often be unable to ascertain.

Too many of the books that we read about Russia have been written by foreigners who have mistaken a partial knowledge, gained by travel and an acquaintance with people in this or that part of the Empire, for a real comprehension of its problems. It is true that the work of a gifted writer of another nationality may occasionally afford a clearer insight into the underlying causes of a series of events than that of a native of the country in which those events took place. Carlyle, for instance, drew a picture of the French Revolution such as no Frenchman could equal at the time, but Russia has not yet had her Carlyle, and meanwhile there is no doubt that the world has been poorly informed by newspaper correspondents and other foreign writers who, in spite of conscientious effort and perhaps because of too great a desire to be readable, have utterly failed to present the truth. Russia is too vast and her people too vague, complex and idealistic to be photographed by snapshots, as it were ; nothing short of a life-experience, and the sympathy which comes of identity of blood and mentality, can enable one to portray Russia and the Russians with entire faithfulness.

This, then, is why the contents of this book are so

illuminating in spite of their fragmentary nature. M. Iswolsky was not only the most patriotic of Russians, knowing the nature of his countrymen in every class of society, from the aristocrat to the peasant, and fervently desirous of justice for all, but he had the advantage of a cosmopolitan training which enabled him to study the problems of other countries, to discover how those problems had been solved and to apply the knowledge so acquired to the improvement of social conditions in Russia.

Long before the revolutionary outbreak of 1905 he saw clearly the dangers that beset Russia, because of the persistence with which the short-sighted bureaucrats who surrounded Nicholas II. clung to their antiquated notions of government. He saw no other way to avoid a reign of anarchy than to establish in Russia some form of representative government, but without destroying what was good in the existing system. He had too great an appreciation of law and order to believe that, by merely tearing down the edifice, another would miraculously arise in its place with no faults of construction. In other words, he was a meliorist, and so met the usual fate of that unpopular and often bitterly hated class, having to endure the attacks of the extremists on either side. It is a melancholy fact that great wrongs can seldom be redressed by moderate means. Obstinacy is vociferous on the one hand and fanaticism on the other, while the voice of the perfectly balanced reformer remains unheard. So, in Russia, the efforts of M. Iswolsky and other moderate liberals, momentarily successful though they were, ended by pleasing neither side. He was violently accused of being an upholder of Czarism in the worst sense of that word, namely reaction, persecution and injustice. At the

same time he was attacked with no less violence by the reactionary Press as being a dangerously revolutionary member of the Cabinet during his tenure of the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. His fears proved only too true, and he lived to see the pendulum swing from autocracy to Bolshevism. There was no place for moderation, tolerance and broad-mindedness in the passionate struggle for supremacy between the reactionary and revolutionary parties.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alexander Iswolsky was born at Moscow on the 17th March, 1856. His family was of ancient Polish origin, established in Russia for centuries, and belonged to the rural gentry, who, as he tells us in his memoirs, preferred a quiet, comfortable and cultured life upon their estates to the turmoil of political life and the social activities of the capital. He graduated from the Imperial Lyceum at St. Petersburg in 1875, the youngest of his class, receiving the gold medal, the highest reward attainable at the Lyceum. His thesis was the Brussels Conference of 1874 on the laws and customs of war.

Immediately after finishing his studies at the Lyceum he entered the Foreign Office as Attaché to the Chancellerie of Prince Gortchakoff, and three years later he became secretary to the international commission at Philippopolis for the organization of Eastern Roumelia. As a reward for his brilliant work upon that commission he was appointed first secretary of legation at Bucharest. He was then only twenty-three years of age.

From Bucharest he was transferred to Washington, where he studied with the greatest interest a system of government differing as completely as possible

from anything he had known in Europe. He made full use of the opportunity to gain a thorough knowledge of the origins of the American Constitution as defended in the *Federalist* by Hamilton and Madison and as interpreted by Marshall and other great jurists. The young diplomat's serious occupations did not prevent him from entering with enthusiasm into the social life of Washington and New York, where he made many friends.

In the year 1890 he had his first great opportunity to distinguish himself in diplomacy. The relations between Russia and the Holy See having lapsed, M. Iswolsky was sent to Rome with a view to their re-establishment. His overtures were so tactfully presented that he won the interest and regard of Leo XIII., and soon became a favourite of that great pontiff as well as of Cardinal Rampolla. It was not long before his efforts were crowned with success. Diplomatic relations were resumed and M. Iswolsky was appointed Minister Resident at the Vatican.

It was at that period that he married the beautiful and accomplished Countess Toll, a daughter of the Russian Minister to Copenhagen. M. Iswolsky was wont to attribute to his charming wife a large share of his success in the important diplomatic posts which he afterwards filled. In one of the chapters of this book he ascribes the first interest that the Empress Dowager of Russia displayed in his efforts for constitutional reform to her affection for Madame Iswolsky. At the time of his death the journals of Paris, in their obituary notices, recalled her kindness, tact and gracious hospitality when Ambassador at the French capital and her untiring solicitude for the wounded during the dark days of the war.

After his brilliant record at Rome, M. Iswolsky became Minister Plenipotentiary at Belgrade, and afterwards occupied successively the posts of Munich, Tokio and Copenhagen. In 1906 he assumed the heavy responsibilities of Minister of Foreign Affairs, and it is the earlier part of his tenure that forms the subject of these memoirs, though they also cover in a general way his activities while at Copenhagen and his reasons for resigning his post at Tokio.

While unsuccessful in his negotiations with Count von Aerenthal at Buchlau in 1908, concerning Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, his tact prevented a serious rupture between Russia and Austria, and led indirectly to the consummation of the *entente* with England and France and the renewal of friendly relations with Japan. Toward the close of his service as Minister of Foreign Affairs, the political affiliation with M. Stolypine, which he describes in his memoirs, suffered a change, due to his disapproval of M. Stolypine's nationalist ideas, notably with respect to Finland, and he resigned from the Ministry to become Ambassador to France in 1910.

His love for France, his understanding of her people and his admiration for their heroism and endurance made the years which he spent at Paris most valuable politically and most agreeable socially. His fidelity to the cause of the Allies and his faith in their ultimate victory was unwavering. The writer of these lines recalls the emphasis with which he said one day in June of 1918, when the German Army was approaching Paris, that the world would not be worth living in if so preposterous an outcome should result as Germany's triumph.

M. Iswolsky ceased to be Ambassador and his political

career ended when the provisional Government of Prince Lvoff was supplanted by Kerensky's ephemeral dictatorship. Thereafter he divided his time between Paris and Biarritz, always hoping for a re-establishment of orderly conditions in Russia. It was in the spring of 1918 that he began the writing of his memoirs. In May of that year he was placed at the head of the "League of Russians Faithful to the Fatherland and Her Alliances," and he conferred often with his compatriots in France regarding steps that might be taken in conjunction with the Allies for the formation of a stable government in Russia. But his political activities were terminated in December, 1918, by a severe attack of influenza, from the effects of which he never fully recovered, and early in the summer of 1919 he was taken to a sanatorium in Paris, where, after several months of intense suffering, heroically endured, he died on the 16th of August.

\* \* \* \* \*

A nice appreciation of M. Iswolsky's character and achievements as a statesman cannot be arrived at without taking into account the refined tastes and the high culture which distinguished him in his private life, for they reveal the same love of order and proportion that inspired his political ideas and aims, and, in fact, as his daughter has pointed out in a brief sketch, they are symbolic of his wider activities. Mademoiselle Iswolsky writes :

"My father was a passionate lover of architecture, interior decoration and the laying out of gardens. There is not a house that he lived in during his journey through the world which did not gain in beauty by his care.



Drafting plans, consulting architects and decorators was his favourite pastime. The Russian Embassy in Tokio and its garden, the reception rooms of the Foreign Office at St. Petersburg, the dainty French garden of the Embassy in Paris, are all the happy results of his planning. He loved beautiful houses, and his own home was what he loved best of all.

"This taste for harmony, beauty and elegance was deeply implanted in his being and was very characteristic of his personality. His keen sense of the fitness of things guided him in all matters both private and public. He was just as particular about the smallest reception held at his house as if it were the most important diplomatic meeting. He disliked a disproportionate building as he disliked a disproportionate mind, and it seems to me that his great admiration for things beautiful, orderly and noble may be said to have served as a motto for his whole life."

Mention has been made of the retired life led by the rural gentry to which his family belonged. It would seem most natural that he should have been content to enjoy the quiet pleasures that that life could have afforded him, instead of entering the arena of politics at the earliest opportunity. The explanation lies in his love of work, his insatiable thirst for greater knowledge with which to attack the problems that beset the Russia of his day and the consequent need of studying conditions in other countries and coming in contact with leading men of other nationalities. This gave him a constantly broadening outlook and a tolerance which left his mind always open to new impressions and new currents of thought. Throughout his life he was a great reader of history, political economy and philosophy.

By applying the learning so acquired, and the practical experience gained from his association with other men of culture in many countries, to the problems which confronted him in the course of his diplomatic and political activities, he developed the sane judgment which characterized his decisions.

During his stay in Rome he seized the opportunity to study Italian literature and art, of which he was a passionate admirer. He became a profound connoisseur and, at a later period, when he went to Japan, he was equally appreciative of the workmanship and the subtle artistic sense of the Japanese, of whom he always spoke in terms of the greatest admiration. Their ways and customs, as well as those of other peoples with whom he came in contact at his different diplomatic posts, interested him and were respected by him instead of arousing the criticism which is so often expressed by the ordinary traveller. He mastered their languages and gained a real comprehension of their national peculiarities and points of view rarely acquired by an outsider.

His literary style was remarkably clear and exact in whatever language he used. His diplomatic notes were models of correct expression. Nothing vexed him more than a grammatical mistake, a carelessly written letter, an obscure phrase, a vulgar or an inappropriate word, and he was quite as critical, even over-critical, of his own work as of that of others.

An instance of this was his decision not to write his memoirs in English as he had intended. After finishing one chapter he felt that he had not as perfect command of that language as of French, and might at times be hampered in expression. The fear of using a foreign idiom, a wrong preposition, a single word that might not be the best word to convey his meaning, was sufficient



to deter him. The result was his choice of French for the original manuscript, but, with the exception of the last chapter, the translation had the advantage of being revised and commended by the author, whose fine sense of values in both languages detected the slightest variation from his meaning and prevented any error in that regard. The meetings with M. Iswolsky for the purpose of discussing the form and scope of the work and for the reading of the English text will always be remembered with the utmost pleasure by the translator, who trusts that these memoirs, unfinished as they are, of so eminent a statesman and diplomatist will constitute a permanent and authoritative record of the interesting period of Russian history which they cover.

CHARLES LOUIS SEEGER.

*Paris, February, 1920.*

# Memoirs of Alexander Iswolsky

## CHAPTER I

RUSSIA'S POLITICAL SITUATION, 1905-1906

MY appointment to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs took place in the month of May, 1906, and coincided with the opening of the first Douma. I was a *diplomate de carrière* and, from the time that I entered the service of the State, I had been concerned solely with its exterior relations. But, in October of the year before, certain circumstances had led me to take an active part in the domestic affairs of Russia, and this was not without influence upon the decision of Emperor Nicholas to entrust me with the direction of my country's foreign policy.

The circumstances to which I have referred were, in part, as follows :

I was, at the time, Minister Plenipotentiary at Copenhagen, having been transferred from Tokio in 1903, about a year before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War. This post was considered a very desirable one, in the diplomatic world, by reason of the close relationship of the Danish royal family with several European courts and the long and frequent visits that the Czar and the King of England were in the habit of making at Copenhagen. The German Emperor, too, was fond

of appearing there unexpectedly, and, as a natural result of the presence of the rulers of Europe, the Danish capital became a centre of diplomatic activity at such times, affording the foreign ministers accredited there a particularly favourable opportunity to be in evidence. Two of my predecessors, Baron Mohrenheim and Count Benckendorff, had been promoted from Copenhagen to embassies of the first rank; a third, Count Mouravieff, a man of the most mediocre capacities, having succeeded in making himself personally agreeable to Emperor Nicholas, had left Copenhagen to become Minister of Foreign Affairs.

After the death of the Emperor Alexander III., and, still more, of Queen Louise, who was called "the mother-in-law of Europe," Copenhagen had suffered somewhat in importance, but it was nevertheless a good point of observation and, from time to time, although at less frequent intervals, a visit from one or another of the royal relatives gave it again the prestige of former days. As will appear later in these memoirs, it was in the course of one of King Edward's sojourns that I had the opportunity, during long interviews with him, to establish the bases of the agreement concluded in 1907 between Russia and England, which exerted so great an influence on the sequence of events in Europe.

Personally, however, I had had every reason to consider my appointment to Copenhagen as in the nature of a disfavour, because, while I was at Tokio, I had been resolutely opposed to the "strong" policy adopted by Russia toward Japan and inspired by an irresponsible coterie which had gained great influence over the Emperor. Without going at length into a relation of the events which led to the Russo-Japanese War, it will suffice for the moment to say that, in my capacity as

representative of Russia at Tokio, I had recommended with insistence a conciliatory attitude towards Japan and an agreement with that country on the burning questions of Manchuria and Korea. My efforts in that direction had resulted in the mission to Europe of that distinguished statesman, Marquis Ito, with the object of attempting a *rapprochement* between Russia and Japan. That mission, if it had succeeded, would have changed the course of events and prevented the war, but the poor reception accorded to the Japanese emissary at St. Petersburg and the dilatory answers given him by the Russian Government resulted, unhappily, in its utter failure. The clever Minister of Japan in London seized the opportunity to hasten the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

Convinced, from that moment, that the policy adopted by my Sovereign, under the guidance of M. Bézobrazoff and Admirals Abaza and Alexeieff, was leading us inevitably into war, and not wishing to be made the instrument for carrying it out, I asked leave to return to Europe. On my arrival at St. Petersburg I was received very coldly by the Emperor, and the advice that I tried to give regarding the affairs of the Far East and our relations with Japan was systematically disregarded. There was another reason for my cold reception: I had the reputation at the court of Tzar-skoie-Selo of being a "Liberal," and of sympathizing with the movement which was already, even at that period, making itself felt in Russia, in favour of constitutional reform. This could not by any possibility predispose the Czar in my favour, and still less the Czarina, who, even then, manifested reactionary tendencies. Although she had not yet acquired the influence that became so dominant during the last days

of the monarchy, her prejudice undoubtedly contributed to deprive me of the Emperor's confidence. Under these conditions there appeared to be but little chance of my obtaining a diplomatic post of any importance; but, on the other hand, the Dowager Empress, daughter of King Christian IX., treated me with marked good-will. This was in great part due to the friendship which she felt for my wife, who had, so to say, grown up under her eye. (My wife was the daughter of Count Charles Toll, son of the famous general of that name, and during many years the Russian Minister at Copenhagen.) The Czar, in deference to his mother, never named a minister to Copenhagen without first consulting her. So it happened that, in conformity with her wishes, I received the post, a very honourable one, no doubt, but which bade fair to be void of any political importance in my case and in view of the circumstances.

As time went on, however, and the unhappy events of the Russo-Japanese War gradually dispelled the Emperor's illusions, he seemed inclined to recognize my foresight and to be willing to entrust me with a more active rôle. Toward the end of the campaign he caused me to be notified of his intention to appoint me Ambassador to Berlin, a post which was soon to become vacant by the retirement of the aged Count Osten-Sacken. I learned afterwards that, in the meantime, the Emperor purposed putting to good use the special knowledge of Japanese affairs that I had acquired during my stay in the East. As a result of the mediation of President Roosevelt, negotiations were about to be opened at Portsmouth for the conclusion of peace, and the Emperor had hesitated for a long time over his choice of a plenipotentiary. This post had been

offered first to M. Nelidoff, Ambassador at Paris, then to M. Mouravieff, Ambassador at Rome. Both had refused, the one giving as a reason his incompetence in Far Eastern affairs and the other, the state of his health. It appears that, after these refusals, the Emperor had fixed his choice upon me, and that, for forty-eight hours, I had been considered as the chief of the mission which was to be sent to America; but my candidature was vigorously opposed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Lamsdorff, who advocated the appointment of M. Witte, with whom he was closely allied, not only personally but politically. Now, the candidature of M. Witte was particularly distasteful to the Emperor, who had conceived a dislike to that eminent statesman, and a distrust of him that was no less enduring, even when he summoned him to the highest duties in the Empire at a later date. As for me, I was absolutely ignorant of what was going on at the time; since the beginning of the war I had made it a rule not to meddle, in my official dispatches, with matters that were alien to my own special duties, and to refrain from offering any advice whatever to the Government concerning the difficulties that presented themselves. Nevertheless, I was so persuaded of the enormous importance that the personality of our representative would have, in connection with the success or failure of the peace negotiations, that I decided to break my silence, and I wrote a letter to Count Lamsdorff, in which I expressed my conviction, with all the energy of which I was capable, that the only man in Russia who could cope with a task so overwhelming was M. Witte. My conviction was based upon the knowledge that I possessed in regard to the exceptional prestige which M. Witte enjoyed in Japan, and the kindly feeling that



the Japanese retained for him on account of the part he had played during the period just preceding the war. My letter reached St. Petersburg at the very moment when Count Lamsdorff was at a loss for arguments in favour of M. Witte's candidature, and, as he himself told me afterwards, it helped to overcome the objections of the Emperor.

M. Witte went to America, and everyone knows with what consummate talent, I may almost say with what genius, he acquitted himself of his task. The Emperor, when yielding to the advice of Count Lamsdorff, expressed a desire that I should accompany M. Witte as second plenipotentiary, but at that time M. Witte was so strongly prejudiced against me that he insisted on the appointment of my successor in Japan, Baron Rosen, whom he considered to be a more docile colleague. However that may be, not only have I never regretted for a moment having intervened in favour of the selection of M. Witte, but I am convinced that, if my intervention really contributed thereto, I rendered a veritable service to my country. It is a matter of common knowledge that public opinion in Russia has shown scant appreciation of the remarkable achievement of M. Witte at Portsmouth; in this, as in other matters, his compatriots and contemporaries have done him little justice. Personally, I was never on intimate terms with M. Witte, and I felt obliged to oppose energetically some of his political ideas in the domain of foreign affairs, but I am in duty bound to render him homage for what he did at Portsmouth. Neither I nor any other diplomat by profession could have done it; the task demanded all the personal prestige of that "self-made man" to make a proper impression upon the great public of American

democracy, and to obtain for Russia, in spite of her reverses, a moral predominance over the representatives of her adversary. One of the causes of this predominance was the cleverness with which M. Witte knew how to make use of the Press in America, as well as in England, thanks to the devoted and intelligent co-operation of the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, Dr. E. J. Dillon. That remarkably talented publicist had been for a long time on close terms of friendly intimacy with M. Witte and enjoyed his fullest confidence. He accompanied him to America, and I have no hesitation in attributing to Dr. Dillon a large part of the success achieved by the Russian delegation. In closing my comment upon this episode, I will add that, when I first had occasion to address the Douma, I made it my duty to undertake the defence of the Treaty of Portsmouth, although it demanded some little courage to do so at that particular time, and I have the satisfaction of knowing that M. Witte, whose heart was in the right place, in spite of his many faults, cherished thereafter a warm feeling of gratitude toward me, his declared political adversary.

While the negotiations at Portsmouth were in progress, I remained aloof from all active participation in politics, but, a little later, in the month of October, 1905, I was pushed suddenly into a sphere of action that hitherto had been quite unfamiliar to me—the domestic affairs of the Empire. In this way I was brought into direct contact with the Czar and the leading actors in the drama that was then playing in my country.

At that epoch of her history Russia was passing through a most serious internal crisis. The revolutionary movement, which had resulted from the reverses of the Russian Army in Manchuria, culminated in a general strike, which not only stopped all means of communica-



tion, but also completely paralysed the economic life of the country. Violent disorders broke out in the provinces and the agitation assumed a menacing aspect throughout the Empire and especially in the capital. The Dowager Empress, who was then living at Copenhagen, became extremely alarmed at this state of things, and in her conversations with me frequently expressed apprehension. I took advantage of these conversations to try to convince her, and through her to convince the Czar, of the necessity of making concessions, before it was too late, to the reasonable demands of the moderate liberal party, so as to have the help of that party in resisting the steadily increasing exactions of the radicals and the revolutionaries. My efforts in this direction were seconded energetically by the brother of the Empress, King Frederick VIII., a man of great good sense in political matters, who had just succeeded his father, King Christian IX., on the throne of Denmark. The Empress consented to write to her son and persuade him to grant Russia a constitutional charter of his own accord, and it was decided at the same time that I should go to St. Petersburg, deliver the letter and act as the interpreter and the advocate, before the Emperor, of the counsel which it contained.

It was not an easy matter to reach St. Petersburg quickly, the journey by land being impracticable by reason of the railway strike, and there was no direct steamship communication between Denmark and Russia; but, at the request of King Frederick, the Danish East-Asiatic Company placed at my disposal one of their cargo boats, the *St. Thomas*, which had just discharged freight at the port of Copenhagen. I was able, consequently, to embark directly for St. Petersburg; the voyage was rapid, if not agreeable, the *St. Thomas* being

in ballast and the Baltic most turbulent at that season.

At the moment of my arrival at St. Petersburg the crisis was nearing its maximum. I do not wish to surcharge this part of my story with the details of my three weeks' stay at the capital in those historic days of the latter part of October, 1905 ; it will suffice to say that, during the three weeks, I was not only an attentive observer of the events which took place at the time that the Manifesto of October 30th was published, but I also took part in those events, which brought me in frequent contact with Emperor Nicholas, as well as with the principal ministers and political personages of the moment. Simultaneously with the promulgation of the constitution, Count Witte, upon whom this title had been conferred immediately after his return from America, was made president of the first constitutional cabinet and applied himself to the task of establishing the foundations for the new organization of the Empire. He commenced this arduous labour by summoning to St. Petersburg the leading representatives of the liberal and moderate liberal parties, who were then in conference at Moscow and upon whose collaboration he counted for aid in the accomplishment of his task. Among them were Prince Lvoff (afterwards head of the first provisional Government in 1917), Princes Ouroussoff and Troubetzkoy, Messrs. Goutchkoff, Stakhevitch, Roditcheff and Kokoschkine, who was assassinated in prison by the Bolsheviki in the year 1918. Count Witte's object was to draw up, in conjunction with them, a governmental programme, and to persuade some of them to join his cabinet. In the course of these negotiations I devoted myself to an earnest advocacy, before the Emperor, of the formation of an homogene-

ous government, composed of men sincerely desirous and capable of putting in practice the constitutional reforms contained in the Manifesto, but resolute in a determination to resist the ever-increasing demands of the revolutionaries. Among the personages convoked by Count Witte I had some personal friends, and I did my best to persuade them to meet him half-way, but, unfortunately, this plan, the only one whose realization appeared to me to be feasible, was doomed to failure. None of the men invited by Count Witte consented to collaborate with him; political passions were too intense and party tyranny too absolute to permit of their deciding wisely. I consider, even now, that their refusal to sustain Count Witte was a grave political fault and a great misfortune for Russia, for that refusal left him no other alternative but to fall back upon heterogeneous and strictly bureaucratic elements for the formation of his cabinet—elements that were essentially unpopular in the country and unable to give him any strength with which to face the future Douma.

Toward the end of my stay at St. Petersburg the situation was by no means favourable: the publication of the Manifesto had been followed in the provinces by a series of disorders and anti-Jewish "pogroms." These events had taken Count Witte by surprise and provoked an immediate counter-move at Court. The reactionary party took occasion to raise its head and to endeavour to regain its influence over the Emperor; a lively struggle ensued between that party and Count Witte, who had expected, after the act of October 30th, a general acquiescence, but instead found himself the object of violent attack on the part of the extremists of both Right and Left, as well as the contempt of the moderate liberals. When I took leave of Count Witte

to return to Copenhagen, I was struck by the pessimism of his remarks. "The Manifesto of the 30th October," he said, "has prevented an immediate catastrophe, but it has brought no radical remedy to a situation which is still fraught with peril. All I can hope is that I may get along, without too much jostling, until the opening of the Douma; but even that is only a hope and far from being a certainty. A new revolutionary explosion is always possible." A like pessimism on the part of so energetic a man could not but surprise me; it was only explainable by the profound disappointment that he had experienced in the immediate results of the Manifesto, and, above all, the defection of the moderate liberal party, which he had not foreseen and to which he alluded with the greatest bitterness.

The part that I had taken in the *pourparlers* with the moderate liberals made it quite natural that I should be the most probable choice for the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs in a cabinet that might be formed with their co-operation. The Emperor, who, at the time, appeared to be sincerely receptive to the idea of such a cabinet, looked with favour upon my candidature. When he received me in final audience he told me that Count Lamsdorff, a typical functionary of the old regime, who could not and would not accommodate himself to the new order of things, would retire before the opening of the Douma, and that he had me in view as Count Lamsdorff's successor.

After returning to Copenhagen, I maintained a close watch upon the progress of events in Russia, and I was more and more convinced that matters were drawing to a crisis. Count Witte was facing formidable difficulties and it was no secret that the Emperor, while recognizing his extraordinary capacities as a statesman,

was unable to overcome the distrust and repugnance with which he had long regarded his Minister. Count Witte, as well, could hardly disguise his aversion for the successor of Alexander III., with whom he had collaborated and whose fullest confidence he had enjoyed. I will endeavour later to define Count Witte's leading traits of character ; he was beyond doubt a great Minister, even one of genius, but his strong will, at that critical moment of his country's history, was destined to be bruised and broken against a chain of circumstances. One of the reasons for this check in his career, and not the least, was the absolute contrast between him and his sovereign. The fact is that he had been forced upon the Emperor by the progress of events and at a moment when no other choice seemed practicable. The ideas of the liberals were in the ascendant at Court for the time being, but gradually the reactionary party regained its former influence over Nicholas II., and it was not difficult for that party to revive his suspicions of the Premier. It was insinuated that Count Witte was ambitious, ready and willing to overthrow the monarchy and proclaim himself President of the Russian Republic ; I had reason to know, through information furnished to me by correspondents at home, that the Emperor was evidently more and more inclined to listen to such insinuations.

For my part, I placed full reliance upon Count Witte's good faith and the honesty of his efforts toward a solution of the problem without endangering the monarchical principle nor the dynasty, and without, moreover, limiting the imperial prerogatives beyond a point that was rendered inevitable by the tenor of the constitutional charter. Again, therefore, I had recourse to the friendship of the Empress Dowager, who was still living



at Copenhagen ; my object being to persuade the Emperor to trust himself to Count Witte and afford him full scope for carrying out his programme. Several letters of this nature were written by the Empress to her son, but, apparently, with no lasting effect. Count Witte himself was not only fully cognizant of the difficulties of his task, but was less and less sure of being able to finish it successfully.

The Manifesto of the 30th October, had it been promulgated six months earlier, as a spontaneous act prompted by the Czar's own sense of justice, might have conciliated the discordant elements as Count Witte had expected ; but, as it was, that act was considered by the revolutionary party as having been forced upon the Emperor by the pressure of the general strike. That party openly declared that it would not be contented with the concessions already granted by the imperial power, and that the same method would be employed to wrest from that power other and more sweeping privileges.

The revolutionary agitation was rekindled, but, at the same time, it was countered by a movement which arose from the sufferings inflicted by the strike upon the population of the provinces. This counter-movement was cleverly fostered by the reactionary party, which had founded a vast association, called the " League of the Russian People." This league, with the connivance of the local authorities, organized the so-called " black hundreds," composed of the dregs of society and charged with the job of instigating anti-revolutionary disturbances. Far from putting an end to the crisis, the act of October 30th seemed destined to create a new condition of extreme agitation ; in fact, the first three months following the granting of the constitution

were marked by a series of sanguinary encounters, beginning with the Cronstadt revolt. This revolt gave the signal for other military and naval mutinies at Sebastopol and elsewhere; the Volga region and others were the theatre of agrarian disorders and anti-Jewish *pogroms*. These disturbances were particularly violent in the Baltic provinces, where they assumed the character of a veritable *Jacquerie*, and, finally, in the month of December, came the armed insurrection of Moscow, which could only be suppressed with the aid of regiments of the guard from St. Petersburg and at the cost of great bloodshed.

The effect of all these happenings was to weaken considerably the position of Count Witte, whose influence was at the same time being undermined systematically by a member of his cabinet, M. Dournovo, Minister of the Interior, one of the bureaucrats to whom he had been forced to have recourse, on account of the defection of the liberals. M. Dournovo had long been a functionary in the police service and was quite as unscrupulous as he was ambitious; but, on the other hand, he was endowed with remarkable intelligence and energy. He was backed by the famous General Trepoff, the all-powerful chief of police during the period which preceded the promulgation of the Manifesto of October 30th, and, at the time with which we are now concerned, prefect of the Imperial palaces, a position which brought him in daily contact with the Emperor and enabled him to play upon his sovereign's prejudice and indecision. But that which gave to M. Dournovo still greater strength was the protection accorded to him by the Czarina, whose reactionary tendencies were no secret. Thanks to all these circumstances, M. Dournovo, who had now become the soul of the reactionary party,

was in a fair way to acquire a preponderating influence over the Emperor, whom he incited with the utmost perseverance to annul the constitutional charter and to restore the former autocratic government. The Czar himself appeared to incline more and more to these counsels; in the month of December, 1905, when receiving a deputation of reactionaries who came to petition for a re-establishment of the autocracy, he had still maintained that the Manifesto of the 30th October was the "expression of his unchangeable will and could not undergo the slightest attaint"; but, some weeks later, he replied to another deputation, which insisted upon the removal of Count Witte and protested against the emancipation of the Jews, that he would "bear alone the burden of power" that he had assumed at Moscow, and for which he acknowledged "responsibility to God alone," and he added: "The light of truth will soon burst forth and all will become clear; children of Russia, unite and hold yourselves ready." This enigmatic language, coloured with mysticism, gave proof of the progress attained by the labours of the reactionary party and seemed to point to an anti-revolutionary crisis in the near future.

In spite of all these alarming symptoms, the situation improved perceptibly at the beginning of March. Yielding to the advice of Count Witte, the Emperor issued a new Manifesto, accompanied by two ukases, defining the new organization of the Empire in conformity with the principles enounced in the Manifesto of October 30th. The legislative power was delegated to two Chambers: a Council of the Empire, or Upper House, with a membership half nominative and half elective, and the Douma, all of whose members were to be elected.

This organization endowed Russia with a complete



constitutional system, which, although subject to criticism as being defective and insufficient in many respects, was none the less a decisive step forward, and, for that reason, it was frankly accepted by all those, including myself, who represented the moderate liberal party. This party, which had taken the name of "Octobrist," continued to oppose Count Witte on personal rather than political grounds, but declared itself ready and willing to support any Cabinet sincerely desirous of carrying out the above reforms. On the other hand, the more advanced liberals, called officially the Constitutional Democratic party, a name abbreviated to K.D. and then, by a play of words, transformed to "Cadet," remained hostile and maintained that the faculties accorded to the Douma were not sufficient, especially those concerning the vote on the budget and the right of interpellation. The Cadets, who were strongly organized, prepared for an active electoral campaign and placed at the head of their programme a demand for an extension of the powers of the Douma, the opening of which was to take place on the 10th of May. As that date drew nearer it became more and more evident that it would be the signal for the dismissal of Count Witte, who was abandoned by the Emperor and opposed by all the political parties. Several prominent persons were mentioned as being likely to succeed him, all belonging to the bureaucracy, and a number of ministerial slates were drawn up and circulated, almost all of which contained my name for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, causing me no little disquiet, for, while quite willing to join a Cabinet composed of men sharing my own political ideas and with whom I could co-operate in putting the new measures into working order, I did not enjoy the prospect of allying myself with a group of bureaucrats,

who would be sure to fall foul of the Douma. Furthermore, having been out of all active diplomatic work for three years, I felt inadequately prepared for the task of directing the foreign affairs of my country at so troubled and critical a period. I resolved, then, to try to persuade the Emperor to place at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for the time being, an older and more experienced diplomatist—M. Nelidoff, for example—and appointing me, as he had at first intended, to one of the important Embassies for a while, in order that I might acquire a better knowledge of the undercurrent of European politics.

In the month of March I obtained a three-weeks leave and went to Paris and London, where I wished to confer on the general political situation, and my relation thereto, with our Ambassadors in those capitals, M. Nelidoff and Count Benckendorff. I expected also to rejoin in Paris our Ambassador to Rome, M. Mouravieff, a near relative. I was on terms of great intimacy with all three, besides being in perfect accord with them respecting the leading political questions of the day, so that it was highly important for me to discuss thoroughly with them the international situation created by the foreign and domestic crisis that Russia had just undergone. I hoped, too, to gain M. Nelidoff's consent to the plan that I intended to propose to the Emperor.

My stay in Paris and in London resulted most happily for me, in that it gave me the chance to arrive at a complete communion of ideas with M. Nelidoff, Count Benckendorff and M. Mouravieff as to the policy to be adopted by Russia. It was, in fact, the identical policy that I submitted to the Czar when, only a few weeks later, I became Minister of Foreign Affairs, and it finally developed into the arrangement which became known

to the world as the "Triple Entente." This communion of ideas endured throughout the entire term of my Ministry, and it is with a sentiment of profound gratitude that I invoke in these lines the memory of those three eminent statesmen who gave me, on every occasion, their most intelligent and most loyal co-operation, and not one of whom, alas, is now numbered among the living.

On the other hand, my plan for bringing about the appointment of M. Nelidoff to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs met with a categorical refusal on his part, and no other course remained open to me than to prepare myself, quite against my will, for undertaking a task that was rendered peculiarly difficult and irksome by circumstances.

My sojourn at Paris and London coincided with an exceedingly interesting political phase—the last days of the Algeciras Conference. The debates at Algeciras summed up, one might say, the diplomatic work that had been accomplished in Europe for a year past, and it was of great interest to me to inform myself of all that had taken place behind the scenes at the Conference. M. Nelidoff and Count Benckendorff, with the best of good-will, initiated me into all the details of the complex play of rival interests that became manifest during that memorable meeting.

That period was marked by an incident to which the historians of the Conference have given but little attention, but which, to my mind, exerted great influence upon the relations between Russia and Germany, and, consequently, upon the course of events in Europe; I allude to the circular note of Count Lamsdorff, directing the Russian representatives to convey to the Governments participating in the Conference the instructions

that had been issued to the Russian plenipotentiaries at Algeciras with regard to the crucial question of the police. The object of that circular was to put an end to the rumours, started in Berlin, to the effect that Russia refused to support France in that controversy and was ranging herself under the German flag. M. Nelidoff, alarmed by those rumours, considered it necessary to calm French public opinion, and with that end in view, communicated the contents of the dispatch to the French journalist, M. Tardieu, who published a résumé in *Le Temps*. This provoked a violent outburst of anger on the part of the German Emperor, who not only was disappointed because of the assistance given to France by Russia in the premises, but felt that a personal injury had been done him by the publicity with which it had been accompanied. He did not hesitate to criticize Nicholas II. in public, and in most uncomplimentary terms, for the Czar's black ingratitude to Germany, and, at the same time, the German Press, reverting to the well-worn subject of the benefits heaped upon Russia by Germany during the war with Japan and Russia's ingratitude therefor, commenced a violent campaign against Russian diplomacy, pursuant, no doubt, to Government order. Finally, the German banks were directed, under pretence of reprisals, to abstain from all participation in the Russian Loan which was being negotiated in Paris and a slice of which had been reserved for them.

It was not until later, when, in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I gained full knowledge of the Kaiser's efforts to draw Emperor Nicholas into an alliance with Germany, that I was in a position to comprehend completely the underlying causes of the German Emperor's disappointment and chagrin. His temporary success

in that direction, through the famous interview at Bjorkoe, has since been fully revealed, as will be recounted in the next chapter, in which I will also explain how the Kaiser's plan was thwarted by the intervention of Count Lamsdorff. At the moment of which I am speaking, the German Emperor had not lost hope of holding the Czar to the Bjorkoe agreement, but the publication of Count Lamsdorff's dispatch furnished him with a tangible proof that his plans were definitely upset, and he straightway conceived for Emperor Nicholas a hatred that he managed to conceal for some years, but which burst all bounds when he finally decided to throw off his mask in the month of August, 1914.

This incident of the dispatch of Count Lamsdorff had a curious epilogue at Berlin. Prince von Bülow, on being interpellated concerning the subject by Bebel in the Reichstag, rose to reply, when he was seized with a fainting-fit. Although his health was re-established, he remained in private life for some time after. It is certain that his reply, if it had not been suddenly interrupted, would have revealed to the public the radical change that had taken place in the Russo-German relations, a change which, at that time, was not fully comprehended except by those conversant with all the facts.

It was during my visit to Paris and London that I learned the first results of the elections for the Douma. These results proved clearly that the Cadets were about to win a crushing victory, not only over the reactionaries, but over the Octobrists as well. The supremacy of the Cadets was due, principally, to their superior organization, but the Government, or, rather, M. Dournovo, had contributed to their success by a policy of blind and brutal repression that had exasperated the more moder-

ate elements. This confirmed my fears that the new Cabinet, as it was to be constituted, would be brought into collision with the Douma at the very start, and I felt all the more repugnance at the prospect of belonging to it.

Shortly after my return to Copenhagen I was summoned to St. Petersburg by the Emperor, to succeed Count Lamsdorff. I had no choice but to obey, and I arrived at St. Petersburg the same day that the Douma opened, just in time to be present at that memorable ceremony in the Winter Palace. The Emperor accepted the resignation of Count Witte on that day, and appointed M. Goremykine Prime Minister. An almost complete change in the *personnel* of the Cabinet followed; I made a final attempt to stay out, but the Emperor appealed to my loyalty in terms which made it quite impossible for me to persist in my refusal and, a few days afterwards, my appointment to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs was gazetted.



## CHAPTER II

### THE SECRET TREATY OF BJORKOE

**B**EFORE speaking of my entrance upon my new duties, it seems necessary to explain the general political situation in Europe as it existed at that time, and, in connection therewith, I must dwell at length upon an episode which has been of particular interest to the public in France and England. I allude to the secret treaty between the Czar and the German Emperor, signed at Bjorkoe in the summer of 1905.

The publication of this treaty by the Russian revolutionary Government in 1917, together with the telegraphic correspondence exchanged by the two sovereigns, has given rise to many controversies and a copious literature. Some of the books and newspaper articles in which it has been discussed are clearly partisan in their nature, and charge Emperor Nicholas unjustly with being guilty of the most heinous of crimes : that of betraying his ally, France ; others, written in a more equitable spirit, are necessarily incomplete and fail of convincing because the authors did not have access to the original documents.

The treaty of Bjorkoe was signed the year before I assumed the direction of the foreign policy of my country, so I played no immediate rôle in that episode, but in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs I was

enabled to inform myself minutely of all the facts bearing upon it. I am convinced that I should fall short of my plain duty toward the unfortunate sovereign whom I served for so many years and whose good qualities, as well as whose weaknesses, I recognize, if I did not contribute my testimony to a discussion that has been unduly confused by polemics. But, in giving considerable space to this incident, my object will not be solely to endeavour to re-establish the real facts; the affair of the secret treaty illumines, in a peculiarly clear and striking manner, the entire international situation as I found it when I took up my new functions. I myself was obliged from the beginning to take its consequences into account, and my recital would be incomplete, and even almost incomprehensible, if I should not enter into the details of this affair at the start.

The international situation, in the spring of 1905, presented an aspect that was peculiarly complex and even threatening. The unfortunate war with Japan had not only resulted in the enfeeblement of Russia, but had shaken the whole edifice of European politics. This political system, for a long period, had been based upon an equilibrium of forces, notoriously unstable: a dual alliance between Russia and France, counter-balanced by the triple alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The immediate and natural effect of the enfeebling of Russia by the war, and, more still, by the revolutionary movement provoked by her military defeats, had affected dangerously the dual alliance. It was realized in Paris, as well as in London, that the balance of power could not be re-established unless England should renounce her traditional policy of "splendid isolation" and develop a very much closer



understanding with France. An important step in this direction had been taken, under the special inspiration of King Edward VII., by the Anglo-French agreement regarding Egypt and Morocco, in 1904. This agreement developed rapidly and soon took the form of a veritable *Entente Cordiale*. During the Russo-Japanese War this *entente* made itself felt in the most efficacious manner by helping towards a peaceful solution of the quarrel between Russia and England, which arose from the Dogger Bank incident and threatened to end in an armed conflict.\*

\* The Dogger Bank incident took place on the night of the 21st of October, 1904, when Admiral Rojdestvensky's fleet, *en route* for the Far East, was crossing the North Sea. Falling in with a flotilla of Hull fishermen, and believing that he was surrounded by Japanese destroyers, whose presence in those waters had been reported by the Russian Bureau of Information, the admiral opened fire. An English trawler was sunk and several others were seriously damaged. One of the Russian cruisers, the *Aurore*, was also hit. Admiral Rojdestvensky surely must have recognized his blunder the next morning, but none the less he continued his voyage without stopping, and persisted in his version of a Japanese attack. This incident aroused the liveliest indignation in England, and came near provoking a rupture with Russia. Being at that time Minister at Copenhagen, I was naturally the first to be informed as to the truth of what had taken place in the North Sea. A few days before, I had visited the fleet during its passage through the Grand Belt, and I could see that the admiral and many of his officers were in a state of nervous excitement over the report that had reached them, to the effect that destroyers had been dispatched by Japan to European waters. This report emanated from an individual who called himself Harting, but whose real name was Landesen, a former anarchist who had come into the service of the Russian Police and who later became notorious as the chief of the Russian Secret Police in Paris. He had come to Copenhagen several times, and communicated to me his reports on the subject of the presence of Japanese destroyers in the vicinity. Being distrustful of him, I made my own investigations and was soon convinced of the fanciful nature of his information, the sole object of which was to extort huge sums of money from the Russian Government. I believed it to be my duty to inform whom it might concern in Russia, but my warning was unheeded. For my part, I perceived a danger for our fleet, not from Japanese destroyers, but because of its hasty and defective preparation, which rendered its passage through the Grand Belt very hazardous. I obtained from the Danish Government, not only the help of its best pilots, but also the presence of its gunboats, which were stationed so as to indicate

On the other hand, the German Emperor, who had done everything in his power to encourage the Czar in his policy of adventure in the Far East, now profited by every occasion to poison the relations between Russia and England. The ruler of Germany had long nourished a plan for isolating England and regrouping the European Powers so as to form an anti-English league on the Continent. A similar grouping had been effected temporarily in 1895, when Russia, France and Germany joined in presenting an ultimatum to Japan after the treaty of Simonoseki. Emperor William was the soul of this hybrid combination, in which France only joined half-heartedly, Russia more or less unconsciously, and from which England prudently withheld. This combination had only a short life, but, nevertheless,

the dangerous points throughout the entire length of the straits. The passage of the Grand Belt was thus effected without confusion or accident, but immediately after emerging from the straits an incident ensued which, happily, entailed no serious consequences. The admiral, sighting some Norwegian cargo-boats, mistook them for Japanese destroyers and fired several shots, without, however, reaching them. I was therefore but little astonished when I learned what had taken place a little later in the North Sea. Some time afterwards I obtained the testimony of an eye-witness, a Danish bandmaster who accompanied the admiral and who, after leaving the fleet at Tangier, had come back to Copenhagen. I reported his testimony to my Government, which refused to believe it and continued to give credit, against all the evidence, to the version of Admiral Rojdestvensky.

Finally, the French Government, profiting by its close relations with Russia as well as England, interposed its good offices, which led to the formation, in conformity with the Hague Convention of 1899, of an investigating commission, composed of French, American and Austrian delegates, who met at Paris under the presidency of Admiral Fournier. The very able report of this commission, while verifying the error committed by Admiral Rojdestvensky, recognized his good faith and exonerated him from all blame as far as concerned his duty to humanity. Russia agreed, with good-will, to pay indemnity for the damaged caused. It may safely be said that, thanks to the amicable character infused by France into the labours of the commission, this painful difficulty was settled, not only without further embittering the relations between Russia and England, but in a manner predisposing the two nations towards greater friendship in the future.

it produced abominable results, for to it may be ascribed the initial causes of the troubles which took place in the Far East in 1900, and, in consequence, of the subsequent conflict between Russia and Japan.

In fact, after having set on foot a diplomatic procedure which evicted Japan from the continent of Asia, the German Emperor himself took forcible possession of Kiao-Chiau and encouraged the Czar to seize the peninsula of Liao-Tong, with Port Arthur, which had just been torn from the grasp of Japan. This action, essentially immoral in itself, excited bitter resentment on the part of the Chinese as well as the Japanese. In China it was the point of departure of the Boxer movement, which brought the forces of the Powers to Peking and served as a pretext for the occupation by Russia of a part of Manchuria. In Japan it heightened the feeling of anger against Russia for having aided in depriving the Japanese of the fruit of their victories. Later, it was again due to the impulsion of Emperor William that the Czar engaged in political activity in the Far East; in this connection the famous telegram may be recalled to mind, in which the Kaiser, after an interview off Reval, saluted Emperor Nicholas with the pompous, but all too illusory, title of "Admiral of the Pacific." Most characteristic of the methods of William II. is the fact that, at the same moment when he was pushing the Czar into difficulties with Japan, he was doing his very best to further the establishment of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which strengthened Japan and increased the chances of a conflict with Russia; the posthumous papers of Count Hayashi, signer of the treaty, which were published at Tokio in the year 1913, leave no doubt whatever on this point. Besides, it is only too evident that Germany had nothing to lose

and everything to gain by a war between Russia and Japan; if Russia should come out victorious, she would be involved for many years in Far-Eastern affairs, and all her energies would be absorbed in preparation for a possible *revanche* on the part of Japan; while, if she should be defeated, she would be enfeebled and profoundly humiliated. In either case the influence of Germany would be increased in proportion and her Emperor would become the arbiter of Europe.

As it turned out, the Kaiser's plans were marvellously seconded by the course of events. Russia suffered more than one could have foreseen by the war, and, above all, the domestic circumstances that were brought on by her defeats. During the entire length of the war the Kaiser profited by every opportunity to proclaim the services that he had rendered to Russia and the claims which he pretended to have acquired for the gratitude of Emperor Nicholas. In reality, the Kaiser's adoption of an attitude that caused Russia to lessen her defences on her western front was evidently for the purpose of urging Russia farther and farther into the quicksands of the Far East; besides, Germany had been recompensed already, very liberally, for this apparent service by the signing of a treaty of commerce, extremely advantageous to the Germans and onerous for Russia. Did not Count Witte, who found himself obliged to sign this treaty, declare that its effects were equivalent to a heavy war indemnity imposed upon Russia?

We have seen that Emperor William neglected no means of keeping alive the feeling of resentment that the Czar cherished toward England, and that he made use of all incidents of a nature to establish the complicity of the English with the Japanese. Nothing

could be more instructive in this connection than the secret telegrams exchanged between the two sovereigns, found by the Russian revolutionary Government in the archives of Tsarskoie-Selo and published by its order in the Russian and foreign periodical Press.\* For instance, à propos of the Dogger Bank incident, he telegraphed to Emperor Nicholas on the 30th of October, that is to say, at a moment when there could no longer be any doubt of the non-existence of Japanese destroyers in the North Sea :

“ Heard from private source that Hull fishermen have already acknowledged that they have seen foreign steam-craft among their boats, not belonging to their fishing fleet, which they knew not. So there has been foul play. I think the British Embassy in Petersburg must know this, news whereto are kept from the British public till now for fear of ‘ blamage.’ ”

When no incident of this nature presented itself, the Kaiser collected with great care and communicated to Emperor Nicholas all the gossip and all the calumnies calculated to increase the latter's distrust of England, nor did he hesitate to resort to the fabrication of false news when it appeared advisable.

Let us take, for example, his telegram of the 15th November :

“ From reliable source in India I am secretly informed that expedition *à la* Thibet is being quickly prepared for Afghanistan. It is meant to bring that country for once

\* The two Emperors spoke and corresponded in English, and the original text of the telegrams found at Tsarskoie-Selo was published in the *New York Herald* in the months of September and October, 1917. The telegrams cited here are reprinted from the same source.



and all under British influence, if possible direct suzerainty. The expedition is to leave end of this month. The only not English European in Afghanistan service, the director of the arms manufactory of the Emir, a German gentleman, has been murdered, as *preamble* to the action."

As a matter of fact, the "English expedition to Afghanistan" had been announced by the English Press since the beginning of the month, and all it amounted to was the sending to Kabul of a political mission, which was to stay there for a few weeks.

And is not this other telegram of the Kaiser's, dated November 19th, an extraordinary hodge-podge of invention and perfidious advice? In spite of its length, it is worth quoting in its entirety :

"Lambsdorff\* leaves to-night with letter. My statements about India in last telegram are corroborated by the speech of Lord Selborne, who alluded to the Afghanistan question. I hear from trustworthy private source that authorities in Tokio are getting anxious at the future outlook of the war. They have expressed their mortification at not having gained a real success at Liaoyang, considering enormous loss of men, because they were without any fresh reserves. The steady pouring in of fresh battalions from Russia is quite far beyond their expectations, as they never thought the Siberian railway capable of keeping up the transports unremittingly. They begin to see in consequence that, though they are at an end with their *cadres*, and

\* This is not the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs of that period, but a German officer of similar name, whom the Kaiser had sent as an attaché to the Czar personally.

especially officers, your army is daily increasing in strength, men and striking power, and that the scales of war are slowly but surely turning against them. A Japanese general went so far as to say: 'The soup we have cooked we must now eat it up.' My suspicions, accordingly, that the Japanese are trying secretly to get other Powers to mediate because they are now at the height of their successes, have proved correct. Lansdowne has asked Hayashi to intimate to England the conditions upon which Japan would conclude peace. They were telegraphed from Tokio, but were so preposterous that even blustering Lansdowne thought them too strong and urged Hayashi to tone them down. When they made a wry face and difficulties, Lansdowne added: 'Of course England will take good care that a medieval Russia will be kept well out of Manchuria, Korea, etc., so that *de facto* Japan will get all she wants.' That is the point the British have in their eye when they speak of friendship and friendly mediation. France, as I hear from Japan, is already informed of these plans and, of course, a party to this arrangement, taking, as usual in the new *entente cordiale*, the side of England. They are going to offer you a bit of Persia as compensation, of course far from the shore of the Gulf—*ça va sans dire*—which England means to annex herself, fearing you might get access to the warm sea, which you must by right, as Persia is bound to fall under Russian control and government. This would give either a splendid commercial opening, which England wants to debar you from. Probably your diplomatists will have reported all this to you before, but I thought, nevertheless, it my duty to inform you all I know, all of which are authentic serious news from absolutely trustworthy sources. Lansdowne's words are authentic, too. So



you see the future for your army is brightened up and you will soon be able to turn the tables upon the enemy. May God grant you full success, while I continue to watch everywhere for you. Best love to Alice.

“WILLY.”

In this telegram the German Emperor is seen to be not merely inciting the Czar against England, but even suggesting doubt as to the loyalty of France. Other telegrams reveal similar attempts in that direction. In one he denounces a pretended plan on the part of England and France “to revive the old Crimean combination”; in another he accuses France of having “clearly abandoned Russia throughout the war, while Germany has aided Russia in every way possible.”

The telegraphic correspondence between the two sovereigns enables one to follow, almost from day to day, the progress of Emperor William’s efforts to win over the Czar to his project of a continental league against England. The unfavourable turn in the events of the war caused Nicholas II. to be all the more receptive to the ideas of his cousin, who took advantage of the situation to show his cards more plainly, to the extent of proposing a treaty between Russia, Germany and France, destined “to put an end to English and Japanese insolence.”

But at the very moment when the Kaiser thought he had attained his object a serious difference arose between them: the German Emperor insisted upon an immediate signing of the treaty by Russia without the knowledge of France, which was to be invited to join afterwards; the Czar positively refused his assent to such a proceeding, repugnant to his feeling of loyalty to France as well as to his good sense. The following

telegram, addressed by him to the German Emperor on the 23rd November, 1904, gives proof of the Czar's sentiments :

“ Before signing the proposed treaty, I think it would be proper to submit it to France ; as long as it remains unsigned one can make certain modifications of details in the text, while, if already approved by us both, it will seem as if we tried to enforce the treaty on France. In this case a failure might easily happen. Therefore, I ask your agreement to acquaint the Government of France with this project, and, upon getting their answer, shall at once let you know by telegraph.”

Now it was precisely the scheme of “ enforcing the treaty on France ” that the Kaiser had in mind, so he hastened to reply to Emperor Nicholas by the following telegram, which I cannot refrain from quoting *in extenso* for the reason that, from the first line to the last, it strikes me as being so thoroughly characteristic :

“ Best thanks for telegram. You have given me new proof of your perfect loyalty by deciding not to inform France without my agreement. Nevertheless it is my firm conviction it would be absolutely dangerous to inform France before we both signed the treaty. It would have an effect diametrically opposed to our wishes. It is only the absolute, sure knowledge that we are both bound by the treaty to lend each other mutual help that will bring France to press upon England to remain quiet and keep the peace, for fear of France's position being jeopardized. Should, however, France know that a Russian-German treaty is only projected, but still unsigned, she will immediately give short notice to her friend—if not secret ally—

England, with whom she is bound by *entente cordiale*, and inform her immediately. The outcome of such information would doubtless be the instantaneous attack by the two allied Powers, England and Japan, on Germany, in Europe as well as in Asia. Their enormous maritime supremacy would soon make short work of my small fleet, and Germany would be temporarily crippled.

"This would upset the scales of the equilibrium of the world to our mutual harm and, later on, when you begin your peace negotiations, throw you alone on the tender mercies of Japan and her jubilant, overwhelming friends. It was my special wish and, as I understood, your intention too, to maintain and strengthen this endangered equilibrium of the world through expressly the agreement between Russia, Germany and France. That is only possible if your treaty becomes fact before and if we are perfectly *d'accord* under any form. A previous information of France will lead to catastrophe.

"Should you, notwithstanding, think it impossible for you to conclude a treaty with me without the previous consent of France, then it would be a far safer alternative to abstain from concluding any treaty at all. Of course I shall be as absolutely silent about our *pourparlers* as you will be; in the same manner as you have only informed Lamsdorff\*, so I have only spoken to Bülow, who guaranteed absolute secrecy. Our mutual relations and feelings would remain unchanged as before, and I shall go on trying to make myself useful to you as far as my safety will permit. Your agreement of neutrality was communicated to me by the Emperor of Austria, and I thank you for your telegram doing the same. I think it very sensible and it has my fullest approval. Best love."

\* The truth is that Count Lamsdorff, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, was not kept informed by Emperor Nicholas with regard to the projected treaty.

These arguments were not successful in overcoming the objections of Emperor Nicholas, and, in the month of December, the proposed treaty appeared to be definitely abandoned. We then see the Kaiser renewing in another direction his efforts to bring the Czar into an alliance. At that time England was causing difficulties in the supply of English coal for the Russian fleet, and the German Emperor took advantage of this opportunity to offer Russia the assistance of the German merchant marine and obtained in exchange a declaration from the Russian Government that "Russia considers herself bound to sustain Germany by every means in her power in connection with any difficulties that may arise from having delivered coal to the Russian fleet during the present war."

This amounted almost to a treaty of alliance, but it was regarded as merely a half-success by Emperor William, who, after letting several months pass without renewing his efforts, finally decided, toward the end of the summer of 1905, to try a master-stroke. If he had not been able to convince the Czar through correspondence, he told himself, he could gain his end by getting into personal contact with his cousin. In this he planned most cleverly, for whenever the two sovereigns were together, the impetuous personality of the German Emperor had always dominated the weaker and more refined nature of Nicholas II., who, for his part, was quite conscious of this inequality and distrusted his powers of resistance to the shock of his cousin's fiery eloquence. On several occasions I have noticed the nervousness with which the Czar contemplated an approaching interview with him, a sort of dread that did not pass until their meeting had terminated. It is easy to understand, therefore, why the Kaiser resolved to make an unexpected visit to Emperor Nicholas.

On account of the difficulties existing between Sweden and Norway that year, the German Emperor had given up his usual voyage to the Norwegian fjords and was cruising in the Baltic, off the Swedish coast. At the same time, the Czar had betaken himself to the waters of the Finland archipelago, near Viborg, seeking rest after the emotions and fatigue of that anxious summer in Russia. On the 23rd of July the world was surprised by the unlooked-for appearance of the Kaiser, on board the *Hohenzollern*, in the roads of Bjorkoe, where the Czar's yacht *Pole Star* was anchored at the time. There it was that the famous interview took place and the secret treaty was signed that has aroused such widespread interest and comment since its disclosure by the Russian revolutionary Government.

It has been proved beyond all doubt that the Bjorkoe interview was adroitly brought about by Emperor William, in spite of the claims of the German Press, inspired by the Wilhelmstrasse, attributing the initiative to the Czar. The telegraphic correspondence between the sovereigns of itself is sufficient to establish the truth, but there are these other circumstances to be taken into account, namely, that the German Emperor knew very well that the Czar had only his family and personal *entourage* at Bjorkoe; that Count Lamsdorff, whose opposition he had good reason to fear, was not included in his sovereign's suite; it was imperative to forestall his being summoned from St. Petersburg, only a few hours away. Finally, when proposing in his telegrams to visit the Czar, the Kaiser imposed the utmost secrecy as to his project, and the secret was so well guarded that no one on board the *Hohenzollern*, nor in Germany, and still less in Russia, knew a word of it until the last moment. In a telegram dated the



21st of July the Kaiser expressed himself as rejoicing in the prospect of seeing what a face his hosts would make when he appeared in view of the *Pole Star*. "A fine lark—*tableau!*" he added, at the close of the telegram.

Following is the text of the secret treaty signed at Bjorkoe, as it was found by the Russian revolutionary Government in the archives of Tsarkoie-Selo and published, simultaneously with the telegraphic correspondence exchanged between the two Emperors before and after its signature :

"Their Imperial Majesties, the Emperor of all the Russias, of the one part, and the Emperor of Germany, of the other part, with the object of assuring the peace of Europe, have agreed upon the following points of the treaty hereinafter related, with reference to a defensive alliance :

"Article I. If any European State shall attack either of the two Empires, the allied party engages to aid his co-contractor with all his forces on land and on sea.

"Article II. The high contracting parties agree not to conclude a separate peace with any enemy whatsoever.

"Article III. The present treaty shall be in force from the moment of the conclusion of peace between Russia and Japan, and may only be cancelled by a year's previous notice.

"Article IV. When this treaty goes into effect, Russia will take the necessary steps to make its terms known to France and invite her to subscribe to it as an ally.

(Signed) "NICHOLAS.

"WILLIAM."

The publication, in August, 1917, of the secret treaty of Bjorkoe produced great excitement in France and in England; there was a tendency in the Press of both countries to qualify it, as far as the Czar was concerned, as an act of bad faith—even treason, if you like—to his ally France. Although this interpretation did not tally with the text of the treaty, nor with the circumstances in which it was signed, it was warranted, in a way, by an article of a Russian journalist which had appeared some little time before the publication of the secret documents found at Tsarskoie-Selo. In that article he related certain disclosures which had been made to him on the same subject, by Count Witte, whose intimate friend he represented himself to be.

Here is what Count Witte is described as having said to the aforesaid journalist, after swearing him to secrecy for the period of that statesman's life :

“Within a few days after I had entered upon my duties as President of the Council, the Minister of Foreign Affairs notified me that he desired to confer with me upon an affair of state of the highest importance. It was then that I learned from him of the existence of a treaty of offensive and defensive alliance between the two Emperors. I was astonished and shocked by the knowledge of this secret document, which I deemed contrary to all the rules of political equity, of governmental honesty and to all permissible forms of conduct. Against what country was an offensive meditated? Who had countersigned the treaty? Against whom? Evidently against France, which always had been an object of William's cupidity; against the same France whose people had concluded an alliance with us in the interest of their safety.”

This declaration of Count Witte, if it was really made



in the words above quoted, is not only inexact as to material facts, but it contains a statement that he must have known to be quite false. As will appear later, Count Witte had knowledge of the treaty of Bjorkoe, not for the first time when he was appointed President of the Council, that is to say, in October, 1905, but three months earlier, immediately after his return from America in August. This may be no more than a lapse of memory on the part of the author of the article, but that which undoubtedly emanates from Count Witte himself is the assertion that the treaty of Bjorkoe was an *offensive and defensive treaty directed against France, the ally of Russia*.

The same assertion reappeared later in the book, so remarkable in many respects, written by the English publicist, Dr. Dillon, and entitled "The Eclipse of Russia," which was published in 1918 and contained a recital of facts communicated by Count Witte personally to the author, who, as is well known, enjoyed his full confidence. Dr. Dillon, being obliged to recognize the falsity of his friend's statements, upon comparing them with the text of the treaty, saves himself from the dilemma arising out of this very evident contradiction by explaining that Count Witte's memory was not always to be relied upon during the last years of his life, and that he was oppressed by the danger of the treaty being construed as a move hostile to France.

The truth is, I regret to say, that it is not a question of weak memory on the part of Count Witte, but that in this case, as on other occasions, he misrepresented the facts on account of the deep-seated dislike which he felt toward Emperor Nicholas, a feeling which, in his later years, developed into a veritable hatred. While endeavouring to be fair and just to the memory of Count

Witte, who towered above the level of ordinary men, not merely by his great qualities, but even in his failings, I cannot too severely condemn such an act of posthumous revenge as he committed, not only in revealing to a journalist a state secret of such tremendous importance, but still more in having accused his Sovereign of a crime of which he must have known him to be innocent.

Now that we know the exact text of the treaty of Bjorkoe and the circumstances surrounding its signature, it is quite impossible to sustain the accusation brought against Emperor Nicholas by Count Witte and accepted by Dr. Dillon, as well as by some other writers of lesser standing, of having committed an act of treason toward France. At the time that the Russian revolutionary Government published the secret documents, I took pains to correct, as far as lay in my power, the false construction placed upon the treaty, by communicating what I knew about the subject to an editor of *Le Temps*, M. F. de Jessen, whose interview with me was published in the issue of September 15th, 1917. Having learned all that had taken place at Bjorkoe and having an exact knowledge of the terms of the treaty and the contents of the telegrams exchanged between the Emperors—a knowledge gained, as before-mentioned, during my subsequent direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—it was manifestly my duty to correct an inaccurate version that not only smirched the reputation of Nicholas II., but was also calculated to reflect discredit upon all Russia.

I have the satisfaction of knowing that the article in *Le Temps* contributed materially to enlighten the public with respect to the rôle played by the Czar in this affair, but inasmuch as Count Witte's accusation of treason has been revived with remarkable force and talent by Dr.

Dillon in his work, "The Eclipse of Russia," I cannot refrain from re-entering the debate with the more competent, authentic and complete testimony that my former office as the Emperor's Minister of Foreign Affairs enables me to contribute.

It is necessary, in the first place, to recall the circumstances in the midst of which the Czar found himself on the arrival of the German Emperor, and to endeavour to reconstitute his state of mind and feeling at that juncture. In the course of the few months preceding the famous interview he had seen his armies defeated by the Japanese in Manchuria ; his fleet, under the command of Admiral Rojdestvensky, had been annihilated at Tsushima ; the revolution was spreading throughout Russia and the absolute power of the Czars was menaced by the masses, who claimed the right of representation in the councils of the nation. All this, in the eyes of Emperor Nicholas, was the consequence of his war with Japan, that distant Power which would never have dared to provoke Russia, would never have had the slightest chance of vanquishing her on the battle-field, but for the aid of England, the hereditary enemy who crossed Russia's path everywhere, in Europe as in Asia. Is it to be wondered at that, under such conditions, it was not difficult for the Kaiser to persuade the Emperor of Russia to join him in his plan for a continental coalition against England, and to serve as an instrument for drawing France in also ? We have seen, however, that after several months of correspondence the German Emperor had not succeeded in overcoming the sentiment of loyalty which prevented the Czar from signing the treaty without previously having secured the adhesion of France. The moment and the place were admirably chosen by the Kaiser for triumphing over the scruples

of his cousin, who was alone at Bjorkoe, defenceless, one may say, against the impetuous attacks of a guest who, at the end of his three days' stay, had gained complete domination over the will of his host.

I was told by the Czar himself that the treaty was signed only a few minutes before Emperor William's departure, after a breakfast that took place on board the *Hohenzollern*. Certain writers have ventured to insinuate that the quality and the quantity of the wine served at that repast had something to do with the consent of Emperor Nicholas—a piece of vulgar gossip that it is easy to refute when one has had occasion, as I have, to be often present at similar breakfasts. A like hypothesis is moreover superfluous for explaining the Kaiser's success, as he understood too well how to manage the Czar without having recourse to so brutal a proceeding. At each interview the Kaiser, consummate actor that he was, took pains to appear in a different rôle; every part that he took was carefully studied in advance and adapted to the particular circumstances of the place and the moment; he gave his victim no time to reflect and no chance to escape his flowery eloquence and overbearing manner of argument.

When the two Sovereigns, left alone, had affixed their signatures at the foot of the text, which had been previously prepared by the Kaiser, the latter insisted that the instrument should be countersigned. He had taken pains to bring with him on his voyage a high functionary of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Empire, Herr von Tchirsky, who afterwards became Secretary of State for that Department and whose signature could be considered to take the place of his chief's. There being no personage of equal rank or capacity in the Czar's suite, the German Emperor suggested calling

upon Admiral Birileff, Russian Minister of Marine, who happened to be on board the *Pole Star* as a guest. The old sailor, entirely unversed in matters pertaining to foreign politics, was summoned at the last moment and did not hesitate to set his hand to a document of whose contents he was not even afforded any knowledge; in fact, one of the persons in the Czar's suite told me that, while Admiral Birileff was writing his name at the foot of the page, the upper part was covered by the Emperor's hand. When the Admiral was interrogated by Count Lamsdorff afterwards, he declared that if he should find himself in the same position a second time he would do the same, considering that his duty as an officer of the navy obliged him to obey without question any order given him by his Sovereign Lord.

Now, after having reviewed the circumstances attending the conclusion of the treaty of Bjorkoe, if one examines the text thereof with due care, one cannot but be convinced that Emperor Nicholas never dreamed of entering into an alliance hostile to France and, consequently, there can be no question of treason on his part. It is true that the first article of the treaty provides that "if any European State attacks either one of the two Empires, the allied party engages to aid his co-contractor with all his forces on land and sea"; the imperfect phrasing of this article, if construed without regard to the context, might perhaps warrant the supposition that in case of an aggression by France against Germany, Russia would be bound to take the side of the latter Power, but such an interpretation is rendered absolutely impossible by the tenor of Article 4 of the same treaty, according to which Russia was to take the necessary steps to acquaint France with the terms of the treaty as soon as it was in force, and to propose that France adhere to



it as an ally. It is superfluous to demonstrate the absurdity of inviting France to join an alliance directed against herself.

The evidence, therefore, all goes to show that the treaty of Bjorkoe was in no way an act of treason to France. It is equally clear that it was aimed against England, and England alone. At the time the treaty was signed, England was still the almost open enemy of Russia; an armed conflict between the two countries had just been avoided, thanks to the friendly intervention of France, but the hostile influence of England continued to make itself felt everywhere, to the detriment of Russia. Was it not natural, even legitimate, on the part of the Czar, to seek a guarantee against England, by means of a continental coalition?

But while Emperor Nicholas must be absolved from any intent of treason toward France, it is true, none the less, that he was guilty of a grave error in judgment when he yielded, after so long a resistance, to the persuasion of the German Emperor and allowed himself to sign the treaty without having previously obtained the adhesion of his ally. As soon as the Kaiser had departed and he had leisure to reflect upon what he had done, he realized his mistake, and, when he returned to St. Petersburg, so Count Lamsdorff told me, he appeared to be very much worried and even embarrassed, during the audiences which he granted to his Minister of Foreign Affairs. He let some fifteen days pass before he decided to speak of the treaty; Count Lamsdorff was literally appalled when he learned of it, and exerted himself with all the force at his command to show the Emperor the danger of the situation and the absolute necessity of taking immediate measures for the annulment of the treaty. The Czar saw that he had fallen into a trap and gave

Count Lamsdorff *carte blanche* to take whatever steps might be necessary to get him out, a task to which Count Lamsdorff applied himself with all his experience of affairs and with an energy worthy of the highest praise.

At this stage of the game Count Witte appeared on the scene, having recently concluded the treaty of peace with Japan at Portsmouth. Count Lamsdorff, on account of their personal and political intimacy, counted upon his help to escape from the imbroglio caused by the weakness of the Emperor. On his way home from America Count Witte had stopped at Paris, where his visit coincided with the most acute phase of the dispute between France and Germany on the subject of Morocco; he had occasion to meet the French Ministers, who did not conceal from him their fears of a possible rupture. Knowing that Count Witte had been invited by Emperor William to visit him at his hunting lodge of Rominten, the French Government asked him to do whatever he could to smooth the existing difficulties and to bring about an arrangement. Count Witte was all the more ardent in lending his aid to the Ministers of the Republic because he was engaged in preparing the way for an important loan, destined to re-establish the financial situation of Russia after the war, and because he well knew that the success of the loan depended upon the turn that the Moroccan affair might take. At Rominten the Kaiser showered flattery and attentions of all sorts upon Count Witte, whom he recognized as soon to be the head of the Russian Government, going so far as to treat him almost as a royal personage. There is little doubt that the conversations between the Russian statesman and the German Emperor had a favourable influence upon the negotiations in progress at that same



period between the French Government and the German Ambassador at Paris. Was the treaty of Bjorkoe also touched upon, or did the Kaiser reveal its contents? I used to think so, for one reason, because he telegraphed to the Czar on the 11th of September, asking if Count Witte, whose arrival at Rominten he was expecting, had been informed of the treaty, and, if not, whether he might speak of it to him. Emperor Nicholas replied that so far only the Grand Duke Nicholas, the Minister of War, the Chief of the General Staff and Count Lamsdorff had knowledge of the treaty, but that he had no objection to having Count Witte informed. In spite of this, however, according to a detailed account of his visit at Rominten, communicated by Count Witte to Dr. Dillon and related in the latter's book, the Kaiser spoke only in a general way of his plan for a great coalition of Continental Powers, having for its object the assurance of a permanent peace in Europe, and abstained from any direct allusion to a treaty already signed by him and the Czar. Count Witte explained to Dr. Dillon later that the Kaiser's reserve was probably due to a fear that the revelation would call forth a vehement protest, such as he had made some years before against the arrangement concerning Kiao-Chiau and Port Arthur. While the account quoted by Dr. Dillon contains numerous errors, I believe it is exact as far as concerns this point, and that it was not until after his return to St. Petersburg that Count Witte was informed of what had taken place at Bjorkoe, by Count Lamsdorff.

Truth compels me to say here that Count Witte, when asked by Count Lamsdorff to aid him in his efforts to annul the unfortunate treaty, gave most intelligent help and displayed the greatest energy. For so doing he deserves all the more credit because he had for a long

time cherished the idea of an alliance between Russia, Germany and France. It seemed to him that such an alliance, if not expressly aimed against England, should be, at least, formed without the participation of that Power. He believed, moreover, that it would tend to link the interests of continental Europe to those of the United States of America. Dr. Dillon mentions in his book a very curious conversation on this subject between Count Witte and the German Emperor, during the latter's first visit to St. Petersburg after his accession to the throne in 1888. On that occasion the young Emperor expressed his approval of Count Witte's idea in general, but objected strongly to the exclusion of England from the combination and maintained that America was the enemy against which all Europe should wage a tariff war without mercy.

In an article dealing with the Bjorkoe affair, appearing in the *Revue de Paris* during 1918, M. Bompard, Ambassador of France at St. Petersburg at the time the treaty was signed and an extremely intelligent observer of men and things in Russia, after portraying Count Witte to the life, gives his opinion of that statesman and his foreign policies in the following terms :

“M. Witte was anxious to avoid at any price the calamity of a European war. Now it was very evident that a European war could only have its source in Germany. I am convinced that he placed no reliance upon the military power of Russia to prevent it ; therefore he could think of nothing more effective than an alliance with Germany. But such an alliance, of itself, would have made of Russia the satellite of Germany, so he persisted in his idea of bringing France in as a third party. In the mind of M. Witte, Germany represented

force and France money ; associating herself with both these nations, Russia would at the same time benefit by the force of the one and the money of the other, without running the risk of having to submit to either's hegemony. He was obsessed by this idea and advocated it whenever occasion arose. It would be a mistake to conclude that he had in view the enslavement of France to Germany in place of Russia ; his opposition to the treaty of Bjorkoe, which would have had that very effect, is abundant proof that he entertained no such thought. He did not realize that the inevitable outcome of his cherished plan would be prejudicial to France, no matter how it might be brought about. A Franco-German alliance, with or without the accession of Russia, was distinctly Utopian, and the German Government itself had never contemplated it seriously, except in the fashion attempted at Bjorkoe."

These lines impress me as being a most exact résumé of Count Witte's state of mind. It would not have been strange, especially after his flattering reception by the German Emperor, if he had taken up the defence of the treaty of Bjorkoe, but he was too far-sighted not to comprehend the Czar's blunder as soon as he saw the text of the treaty, and he did not hesitate to join Count Lamsdorff in his efforts to get out of the difficulty.

The negotiations which ensued between St. Petersburg and Berlin, and which only bore fruit after passing through a succession of varying phases, were most delicate and arduous, as may easily be understood. Two accounts have been published so far on this subject : that of Count Witte, reproduced by Dr. Dillon in his book, "The Eclipse of Russia," and that of M. Bompard,

in his article in the *Revue de Paris*.<sup>\*</sup> Both records, although inexact as regard certain details of no great importance, concur with the facts which I learned from Count Lamsdorff and from a study of the documents filed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the private archives of Emperor Nicholas in the Palace of Tsarskoie-Selo.

I will now state, in brief, what happened. Count Lamsdorff began operations with a triple attack of an unofficial nature, by means of a private letter from the Czar to Emperor William, a letter from Count Witte to Emperor William and an informal communication of the Russian Ambassador at Berlin to the Chancellor. The object of these representations was to call attention to the invalidity of the treaty of Bjorkoe on account of its not having been countersigned by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to the contradictions in the text, which made it necessary to subject the contents to a careful examination and revision. None of these proposals met with any success. (The reply to Count Witte's letter was made by the Chancellor.)

Meanwhile, Russia and Japan were about to ratify the Treaty of Portsmouth, and it will be remembered that this was the time indicated for the Bjorkoe

<sup>\*</sup> In this article, substantiated by original documents and characterized throughout by the greatest impartiality, M. Bompard does not hesitate to affirm that for all those who knew Emperor Nicholas well, himself included, the loyalty of the Emperor to France admits of no doubt. The impartiality of the former Ambassador of France at St. Petersburg is all the more praiseworthy because he might well have been prejudiced by a natural feeling of dislike for the Emperor. I will refer later to the circumstances which led to the departure of M. Bompard from St. Petersburg, when he was accused, most unjustly, by the police of carrying on improper relations with the most advanced radicals in the Douma. These reports of the police had the effect of making Nicholas II. suspicious of the distinguished French diplomat, and, in spite of all my efforts, I was unable to dispel a prejudice that eventually caused the Ambassador's recall.

agreement to become operative. Count Lamsdorff accordingly resolved to press the negotiations with greater energy, and he wrote forthwith to M. Nelidoff, Ambassador of Russia at Paris, asking if it was possible to sound the French Government on the subject of an eventual adhesion of France to the treaty of Bjorkoe. M. Nelidoff hastened to reply, without even consulting the French Government, that France, which had never become reconciled to the order of things created by the Treaty of Frankfort and which had just entered into the *Entente Cordiale* with England, would never consent to join such an alliance. A new letter was thereupon addressed by the Czar to the German Emperor for the purpose of explaining the impossibility of carrying out the provisions of the treaty of Bjorkoe under the existing circumstances, and, at the same time, Count Lamsdorff sent instructions to Count Osten-Sacken to declare in a formal manner that, the adhesion of France not being obtainable for the moment and the obligations of the treaty of Bjorkoe being incompatible with those of the treaty of alliance between France and Russia, it was necessary that the Bjorkoe treaty should remain inoperative until such time as an agreement on this subject could be established between Russia, Germany and France. Count Osten-Sacken was instructed to add that considerable time and patience would be indispensable for persuading France to join Russia and Germany, but that the Russian Government would use its best efforts to attain that end.

None of the responses obtained by Count Lamsdorff or Count Witte from Berlin contained—my recollection on this point is positive—any formal acknowledgment of the annulment of the treaty of Bjorkoe, and the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs was obliged to content him-



self for a while with a partial acquiescence ; but he held in reserve his intention to demonstrate later, by actual deed, that Russia did not consider herself bound in any way to Germany and remained faithful to her alliance with France. The occasion for this presented itself at the time of the Algeciras Conference.

The Czar made no further reference to this question in his private correspondence with Emperor William, although the correspondence was continued for some time; without, however, being couched in its former tone of intimacy and confidence, and with less and less frequency as time went on. The German Emperor, on the other hand, did not abandon his project at first, and tried in every way to persuade his cousin to acknowledge the validity of the agreement which they had signed at Bjorkoe, not contenting himself with repeating his former arguments and his calumnies against France and England, but endeavouring to prevail upon the Czar's mind by the employment of dramatic phrases and of language coloured with mysticism. A curious example of these efforts is to be found in a telegram which he sent to Emperor Nicholas on the 12th of October, 1905, that is to say, at the moment when Count Osten-Sacken had just delivered his decisive message at Berlin :

“ Glucksburg, Ostsee,

“ October 12th, 1905.

“ The working of treaty does not—as we agreed at Bjorkoe—collide with the Franco-Russian Alliance, provided, of course, that the latter is not aimed directly at my country. On the other hand, the obligations of Russia towards France can only go so far as France merits them through her behaviour. Your ally has notoriously left you in the lurch during the whole war, whereas



Germany helped you in every way as far as it could without infringing the laws of neutrality. That puts Russia morally also under obligation to us; *do ut des*. Meanwhile, the indiscretions of Delcassé have shown the world that, though France is your ally, she nevertheless made an agreement with England and was on the verge of surprising Germany, with British help, in the middle of peace, while I was doing my best to you and your country, her ally. This is an experiment which she must not repeat and against a repetition of which I must expect you to guard me. I fully agree with you that it will cost time, labour and patience to induce France to join us both, but the reasonable people will in future make themselves heard and felt. Our Moroccan business is regulated to entire satisfaction, so that the air is free for better understanding between us. Our treaty is a very good base to build upon. We joined hands and signed before God, Who heard our vows. I therefore think that the treaty can well come into existence.

“But if you wish any changes in the words or clauses or provisions for the future, or different emergencies—as, for instance, the absolute refusal of France, which is improbable—I gladly await any proposals you will think fit to lay before me. Till these have been laid before me and are agreed upon, the treaty must be adhered to by us as it is. The whole of your influential Press, *Nowosti*, *Novoie-Wremia*, *Rouss*, etc., have since a fortnight become violently anti-German and pro-British. Partly they are bought by heavy sums of British money, no doubt. Still, it makes my people very chary and does great harm to the relations newly growing between our countries. All these occurrences show that times are troubled and that we must have clear courses to steer; the treaty we signed is a means of

keeping straight, without interfering with your alliance as such. What is signed is signed, and God is our testator. I shall await your proposals. Best love to Alice.

“WILLY.”\*

It is evident, from the above, that Emperor William, in spite of the clear refusal of the Russian Government to ratify the treaty, cherished the illusion, or at least the hope, of maintaining his influence over the Czar, and that it was only after the publication of Count Lamsdorff's instructions to the Russian plenipotentiaries at Algeciras that he was obliged to admit his discomfiture.

During the two years that succeeded the events I have just described, the Emperors had no further meetings, and when, in the year 1907, an interview took place at Svinemünde, at which I was present in the capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Czar so dreaded a recurrence of the Kaiser's insistence that he charged me to forewarn the German Chancellor that the treaty of Bjorkoe must be considered as definitely abrogated, and that he could not listen to any arguments on the part of the German Emperor in favour of its revival.

I have already done justice in these pages to the far-sightedness shown by Count Witte in connection with the Bjorkoe treaty. Although he had meditated for a long while upon a project of alliance between Russia, France and Germany, he had the good sense to perceive, from the beginning, that the method adopted by Emperor William could not help causing a rupture of the bonds which united Russia to France. Nevertheless, he was still a strong partisan of the project, and, feeling very sure of his own diplomatic ability after his success at

\* I have the impression that this telegram, the original of which I had an opportunity to peruse, was signed: “Your friend and ally, Willy.”

Portsmouth, he thought he could induce France, in time, to adopt his ideas, and, with this object in view, he had an ardent desire to obtain the post of Ambassador of Russia at Paris. In France, as well as in Germany, he enjoyed a considerable prestige in the financial world, and counted upon carrying out his plans with the help of certain groups belonging to *la haute finance*. He tried by every means in his power to supplant M. Nelidoff at Paris, but always met with a firm refusal from Emperor Nicholas. For my part, I was convinced that the appointment of Count Witte to Paris was inadvisable and even dangerous from the point of view of our relations with France and with England, and I confess that I consistently opposed it while I was Minister of Foreign Affairs. I believe that Count Witte was seriously displeased at this opposition. During his frequent visits to Paris, he did all he could to further his Utopian plan, but failed to gain any considerable number of adherents.

A few days after the conference of the Emperors at Bjorkoe, and while I was still Minister at Copenhagen, I learned that the Kaiser had sent word to King Christian IX. that he would stop at Copenhagen on his way back to Kiel, on board the *Hohenzollern*. I have already mentioned the sudden visits that Emperor William was in the habit of making at the Danish capital; each time he came there was a flurry of excitement, not only at the Court, but throughout the country, due to the resentment of the Danish people against Prussia and the Hohenzollerns, dating from the spoliation of 1864 and still enduring. The Royal Family shared this resentment in the fullest degree, and the presence of the Kaiser at Copenhagen was always a source of bitter reflection to King Christian IX. and his suite. The aversion of the Empress Dowager of Russia, second

daughter of the King, for Germany and everything German was so pronounced that, when she came to see her father, she arrived always on her yacht, in order not to have to cross Germany; when bad weather or the season of the year obliged her to return by land through Germany, she refused to cross the narrow straits between the Danish isles and the German coast in a steamer flying the German colours, and, instead, took a Danish boat to Warnemünde, where a special train of Russian railway carriages awaited her and transported her to the Russian frontier with as few stops as possible. King Christian's third daughter, the Princess Thyra, married to the Duke of Cumberland, had a still greater hatred for the Germans, if that were possible, for, during the unfortunate War of the Duchies, she had not yet left the paternal home and had shared the anguish and even the physical fatigue of her father, and the remembrance of all those sufferings had never been effaced from her memory. At the period of which I am now writing, her husband, son of the last King of Hanover, who had been dispossessed by Prussia, shared her feelings.\* It happened that one of the Kaiser's unexpected visits caught the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland unawares at Copenhagen; rather than be compelled to meet the German ruler, the ducal couple hastened to leave the Danish capital on the same day he arrived. This incident gave the Princess Marie d'Orléans, wife of Prince Waldemar, King Christian's third son, an opportunity for one of those witty remarks for which she was famous at the Court of Denmark; at a great dinner, given that day at the royal palace in honour of the German Emperor, she was heard

\* At a later date, in spite of this prejudice, the lure of the Guelph millions and the Duchy of Brunswick induced him to consent to the marriage of his son with the daughter of Emperor William.

to explain, clearly enough not to escape the ear of the Imperial guest : " Oh, what a nice sauce, and how well it *runs* ; it might be called Cumberland sauce ! "

As for Emperor William, he never appeared to have any misgivings regarding the impression which he produced upon his hosts ; on the contrary, he seemed to be confident that his mere presence and the irresistible effect of his personality won all hearts. Preparing a rôle to suit the occasion, as was his wont, he affected an exaggerated deference for the person of the old King, whom he knew to be adored by his people, imagining that this would endear him to the Danish public. For instance, at the close of one of his visits, when taking leave of the King at the station, he astonished the bystanders by kissing the hand of Christian IX. All his efforts to gain popularity were of no avail, however, and every time he came to Copenhagen the Danish authorities were obliged to take measures to prevent hostile demonstrations on the part of the populace.

In the summer of 1905 public feeling in Denmark was particularly inimical toward the Kaiser for two reasons : during that summer the German authorities had accentuated the vexatious measures to which the Danish population of Schleswig was subjected, and had caused the expulsion of a certain number of young Danes ; moreover, there were persistent rumours in circulation to the effect that the Emperor was trying to persuade Sweden and Russia to join him in closing the Baltic to the men-of-war of all States not bordering on that sea. A campaign in favour of this plan had been inaugurated by the semi-official Press of Germany, causing uneasiness in Denmark as well as in England, and even determining the British Government to order one of its squadrons to cruise in the Baltic Sea, touching at



different Danish, Swedish and German ports. This cruise, by the way, displeased the Kaiser particularly, and gave rise to comments that were far from courteous, on the part of the German Press.

Emperor William's visit to Copenhagen, or rather to the Château of Bernstorff, where the Royal Family was in residence, was understood to be of a private character, and consequently there was no occasion for the foreign diplomatic corps to meet him. I was therefore very much astonished when the German Minister, Herr von Schoen (afterwards Ambassador at St. Petersburg, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and, finally, Ambassador at Paris when war was declared in 1914), came to tell me that the Emperor wished to see me; he added that, as no similar invitation had been extended to any other member of the diplomatic corps, I was requested to say nothing about it to my colleagues. In my efforts to discover the reason for being honoured in a manner so exclusive, I could not, of course, imagine that the Kaiser considered me as the representative of a new and precious ally whom he flattered himself to have acquired at Bjorkoe; I came to the conclusion that the Czar had spoken to him of my probable appointment to Berlin, and that he was curious to know something about me beforehand. I had never met Emperor William, and the prospect of a conversation with him, I confess, profoundly impressed me.

The audience took place at night, in the German Legation, and was attended with a certain air of mystery. It was to this conversation that the Kaiser alluded in a telegram which he addressed to the Czar on his return to Germany, the 2nd of August, 1905, and in which he gave an account of his stay in Denmark. I will recite this telegram without abridgment :



“ Sassnitz (Island of Rügen)

“ August 2nd, 1905,

“ 1 o'clock, night.

“ H.M. THE EMPEROR :

“ My visit passed off well under the extreme kindness shown me by the whole family, especially by your dear old grandfather. After my arrival I soon found out through reading the Press reports, Danish and foreign, that a very strong current of mistrust and apprehension was engendered against my visit, especially from England. The King had been so intimidated and public opinion so worked upon that I was unable to touch the question we agreed I was to mention to him.

“ The British Minister, dining with one of my gentlemen, used very violent language against me, accusing me of the vilest plans and intrigues, and declaring that every Englishman knew and was convinced that I was working for war with and for the destruction of England. You may imagine what stuff a man like this may have been distilling into the minds of the Danish family, Court and people.

“ I did all in my power to dispel the cloud of distrust by behaving quite unconcernedly and making no allusion to serious politics at all. Also, considering the great number of channels leading from Copenhagen to London and the proverbial want of discretion of the Danish Court, I was afraid to let anything be known, as it would have been communicated immediately to London, a most impossible thing as long as the treaty is to remain secret for the present.

“ By a long conversation with Iswolsky, however, I was able to gather that the actual Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count Raben, and a number of persons of influence, have already come to the conviction that, in case

of war and impending attack on the Baltic from a foreign Power, the Danes expect, their inability and helplessness to uphold even the shadow of neutrality against invasion being evident, that Russia and Germany will immediately take steps to safeguard their interests by laying hands on Denmark and occupying it during the war, as this would at the same time guarantee the territory and the future existence of the dynasty and country.

“The Danes are slowly resigning themselves to this alternative, and making up their minds accordingly, this being exactly what you wished and hoped for. I thought it better not to touch the subject with the Danes, and refrained from making any allusions. It is better to let the idea develop and ripen in their heads and let them draw final conclusions themselves, so that they will of their own accord be moved to lean upon us and fall in line with our two countries. *Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre.*”

“The question about Charles going to Norway has been arranged up to the smallest detail, England having consented to everything, and there is nothing to be done any more. I talked with Charles about his prospects, and found him very sober, and without any illusions about his task. What do you say to the programme of festivities for your allies at Cowes? The whole of the Crimean veterans have been invited to meet their ‘brothers-in-arms’ who fought with them against Russia. Very delicate indeed. It shows I was right when I warned you two years ago of the reforming of the ‘old Crimean combination.’ They are fast warming up again with a vengeance. Weather was fine. Best love to Alice.

“WILLY.”

In this telegram, as one may see, Emperor William, after having recounted and explained in his own fashion the apprehension and distrust caused by his visit to Denmark, refers for the first time to a plan which evidently had been discussed between him and Emperor Nicholas at Bjorkoe, and which provided for the occupation of Denmark by their joint forces, in case of a war between Russia and Germany on the one side and England on the other. At the same time, the Kaiser attributes to me certain statements with respect to a supposed tendency, on the part of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and other influential persons of Denmark, to seek in the proposed plan a guarantee for the integrity of their country and the safety of the dynasty. When this telegram was published by the Russian revolutionary Government in 1917, it caused some little consternation in the Scandinavian countries, particularly in Denmark, for it revealed a project concerning which nothing had transpired up to that time, and seemed to imply that Russian diplomacy, in my person, had contributed to its formation; it behoves me, therefore, to make some explanation.

My conversation with the German Emperor lasted for more than an hour, during which certain of the words which he uttered struck me as being so significant that I hastened to convey my impressions in a private letter to Count Lamsdorff; unfortunately I did not preserve the rough draft of that letter, but I have a very clear recollection of the conversation, nevertheless.

For instance, I remember distinctly how astonished I was when the Kaiser, after saying a few words about his interview with Emperor Nicholas at Bjorkoe, but of course without disclosing all that had really occurred, took up the question of the general political situation

and proceeded to explain with great eloquence the necessity of assuring the peace of Europe by entirely new methods, expressing the conviction that this object could only be attained by a union of the three great continental Powers, Russia, Germany and France, directed explicitly against England. Not thinking for a moment that he had anything in mind beyond a sort of paradox or political Utopia, I replied that such a plan would be undoubtedly admirable if one could bring it to pass, but that a grouping of the Powers named appeared to me impossible, for the simple reason that France, in the actual state of affairs, would never consent to join it.

My reply appeared to displease the Emperor, who insisted upon knowing the reasons upon which I based my opinion; consequently I could do no else than explain in the most prudent terms at my command that France was divided from Germany by a deep abyss, created by the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and that until that abyss was filled up the French people would never be the friends of the Germans.

At these words, the Emperor's displeasure developed into unmistakable anger, and it was in a voice almost beyond his control that he made this most astonishing declaration :

"The question of Alsace-Lorraine," he cried, "I consider to be not only non-existent at the present hour, but as having been cut out for all time by the French people themselves. I threw down the glove to France, à propos of the Moroccan affair, and she dared not pick it up; having then declined to fight Germany, France has renounced for good and all any claims she may have had in respect of her lost provinces."

I thought at first that this outburst was merely one of the *boutades* for which the Kaiser was famous, but I

soon perceived that it was a deep-seated conviction of his, for he reverted several times in the course of our conversation to the strange idea that, from the moment that France had bowed to the German threat, at the time of the Moroccan dispute, she no longer had any right to invoke her long-standing grievances as a ground for refusing friendship with Germany. As I continued to express my doubts of a material change in the psychology of the French people, the Emperor surprised me still more by declaring that, if, after all, France persisted in her refusal to join the projected alliance, there were ways to bring her into it *by force*.

This part of the conversation made such a vivid impression upon me and so absorbed my attention that my recollection of the other subjects discussed by the Emperor is somewhat less precise ; but I am absolutely sure that the words which he attributed to me, regarding the supposed tendency of Denmark to seek a guarantee against possible aggression on the part of England, by means of a Russo-German occupation, were misconstrued, to say the least. I knew, as everybody knew, that the Danes lived in constant dread of foreign invasion, but no one in Denmark had in mind any other possible invader than Germany ; the Government was perfectly cognizant of the military weakness of Denmark and the impossibility of resisting aggression alone for any length of time, but its traditional policy had been to seek aid from Powers whose great fault in the past had been to allow the subjugation of Denmark by Germany. Furthermore it was a notorious fact that there existed in Denmark a party—that of the radicals and socialists—which opposed any increase whatsoever in military expenditure and preached non-resistance to outside invasion from any source ; it is very possible that, in



response to a question of Emperor William's regarding the state of the public mind in Denmark, I may have mentioned this fact, but it would be absurd to attribute such ideas to the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, when I knew that Count Raben's chief reason for being more inclined than his predecessors to cultivate good relations with Germany was to ameliorate the lot of the Danish population of Schleswig. Besides, how could I have spoken of an attack by England and a Russo-German occupation of Denmark, when I was in total ignorance of the conversations that had taken place at Bjorkoe? Such eventualities in my view, were beyond all probability.

There was still another reason why I, of all the diplomats accredited to Copenhagen, should have been least suspected of treating lightly the question of Denmark's neutrality or sympathizing with an eventual violation thereof. It will be recalled that I had been requested during the Russo-Japanese War to obtain permission for the passage of Admiral Rodjestvensky's fleet through the Grand Belt, that is, through straits controlled by Danish sovereignty. This occurred before the Hague Conventions had definitely regulated matters concerning the passage of neutral straits in time of war. Japan made every effort to persuade the Danish Government not to grant right of way to the Russian fleet, or, at least, not to lend it the assistance of licensed pilots; but, basing my demand upon the precedent established during the Crimean War, in favour of the allied fleets of France and England, I succeeded in obtaining the same facilities, and others still more important, for the Russian fleet, thereby helping to establish a great principle of international jurisprudence, namely, that of the free navigation of neutral straits in war-time. So it would



have been, to say the least, illogical and unnatural on my part to discuss with Emperor William a possible violation of this principle. At a later time, when Minister of Foreign Affairs, I was instrumental in maintaining the *status quo* in the Baltic, which signified, among other things, the inviolability of the territory of Denmark and the respect for her rights as a neutral Power.

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The foregoing pages, it seems to me, throw a sufficient light upon the general international situation as it existed at the moment when I took charge of the foreign policies of Russia. It was a moment of extreme trial for the Russian Empire, still suffering from the blows received during the war and the ensuing revolutionary troubles, and face to face with grave problems at home and abroad. As Minister of Foreign Affairs I was called upon to take a definite stand with regard to the policy that the Russian Government intended to pursue in its relation to other countries.

The position of Russia in Europe was determined by the fact that for the past fifteen years she had been bound by a formal treaty of alliance to France. The Czar, it is true, had yielded momentarily to the insidious efforts of the German Emperor to engage Russia in a political system of a nature that did not, perhaps, involve a complete detachment from France, but would have placed her at least in a situation infinitely more complicated and uncertain. Fortunately the error of Emperor Nicholas was not persisted in, being contrary to his sentiments of honour and to his good-sense as well, so he had succeeded, with the help of Count Lamsdorff, in extricating himself from the trap that

had been laid for him, and the alliance with France was intact. But we have seen that the preceding two years had witnessed great changes in the *terrain* of European politics; France and England had renounced their old quarrels and an era of mutual confidence and friendship had been inaugurated between the two Powers; Russia had already benefited to a marked degree by the existence of the Anglo-French *entente* during the war with Japan, but, in order to derive permanent and complete advantages, it was clear she also must draw closer to England, and that was manifestly impossible unless she followed the example of France and found some means of settling the numerous difficulties that separated her from England. Moreover, a *rapprochement* with that Power was not sufficient, the necessary corollary being a sincere reconciliation with Japan. The adoption of such a policy not only would fortify Russia's position as an ally of France, but would lay a new and more solid foundation for the whole edifice of the dual alliance. If, on the contrary, Russia neglected to draw the logical conclusions from recent international developments and maintained her strained relations with England and Japan, she would find herself, sooner or later, in a difficult situation between her ally, France, and those two Powers; Germany would seize that opportunity to renew her efforts to detach her from France and direct her energies toward Asia, and perhaps might even succeed in drawing her into an opposing political system. Now there could be nothing more dangerous for the future of Russia and the peace of the world than such a *renversement des alliances*, to use the term applied to the radical change that took place in Europe at the middle of the eighteenth century and which was followed by the Seven Years

War. If Russia turned her back on France and England and engaged in a contest for preponderance in Asia, she would be obliged to renounce not only her historic rôle in Europe but also all economic and moral independence *vis-à-vis* Germany, becoming, to all intents and purposes, a vassal of the German Empire and bringing disaster upon all Europe as well, for, when once free of all danger on her eastern frontier, Germany would only have to choose her hour for a decisive attack on France and England, in order to realize her dream of world-supremacy.

Such was the formidable dilemma that confronted the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and demanded a prompt and irrevocable decision. It will be remembered that this question had been thoroughly discussed with M. Nelidoff, Count Benckendorff and M. Mouravieff during my visit to London and Paris, and we had arrived at the unanimous conclusion that the foreign policy of Russia must continue to rest upon the unchangeable base of her alliance with France, but that this alliance must itself be fortified and enlarged by agreements with England and Japan. This was the programme that I determined to submit to the Emperor upon taking up my new duties, and I had already made up my mind that I would not definitely undertake those duties until I was assured of the Emperor's entire conformity.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST DOUMA

PREVIOUS to the inauguration of the Douma, on the 10th of May, 1906, there were widely varying opinions at Court as to the proper place for that ceremony, and heated discussions ensued between those who favoured the Tauride Palace, which had been especially fitted up as a temporary seat for the new assembly, and those who preferred the Winter Palace. The reactionary party were unwilling that the Emperor should go to the Douma, and the extremists went so far as to advise the Emperor not to appear in person before the deputies, but to have the session opened in his name by the Prime Minister. It was finally decided that the Emperor should follow the procedure adopted at Berlin for the opening of the Reichstag, summoning the deputies to the Winter Palace and opening the session with an address from the throne.

Arriving that same day, I had barely time to don Court uniform and present myself at the Palace. As my nomination had not yet appeared in the *Official Gazette*, I did not join the cabinet ministers, whose place had been assigned in the throne-room reserved for the inauguration, but by virtue of my rank as Chamberlain of the Imperial Court I had only to take my place in the cortège that was to precede the entrance



Alexander Column and the Czar's Winter Palace from the  
War Office Arch, St. Petersburg, Russia.





of the Emperor, in order to witness a ceremony whose very novelty made it exceptionally interesting.

While awaiting the formation of the Emperor's cortège, I walked through some of the rooms of the Palace, where were assembled several thousand generals, officers of all ranks and civil functionaries. Resplendent with multi-coloured uniforms, glittering with gold and silver lace and covered with decorations, they were so disposed as to leave a passage free through the various rooms for the entry of the Imperial procession.

At first there was nothing to be observed that differed in any respect from what one was accustomed to see at the Winter Palace on days of great ceremony, but now, suddenly, between the two hedges of brilliant uniforms, began the sombre procession of the representatives of the people, on their way to the throne-room, where they were to await the Czar, and, for the first time in that elegant rococo Palace, built for the Empress Elizabeth by the Italian Rastrelli, where for one hundred and fifty years had been displayed all the pomp of one of the most sumptuous courts of Europe, a crowd of the most democratic aspect was to be seen. Here and there in the throng one could see a few provincial lawyers or doctors in evening dress, and an occasional uniform was to be noticed ; but that which predominated was not even the simple dress of the bourgeois, but rather the long *caftan* of the peasant or the factory-workman's blouse. Such a contrast could not help being novel and striking, but it was especially impressive, as the deputies filed past between the two rows of officers and functionaries, to observe the expression of the faces on the one side and on the other. Here an old general, there a bureaucrat, grown white in the service, could hardly conceal the con-

sternation, the anger even, that the invasion of the sacred precincts of the Winter Palace by these intruders caused him. And the faces of the deputies, as they passed, were lighted by triumph in some cases and in others distorted by hatred, making altogether a spectacle intensely dramatic and symbolical. The Russia of yesterday found itself face to face with the Russia of to-morrow; what was to be the result of such an encounter? Would the old hierarchy of Czarism prove capable of welcoming these new-comers and endeavour to work with them for the regeneration of the nation, or would there be a collision between the two forces, engendering new struggles of still greater bitterness and perhaps bloodier than before?

For my part, I was at that time full of hope that a new era of grandeur and prosperity for Russia was dawning, but I was conscious, none the less, of a certain feeling of anguish at finding myself on the threshold of so radical a change in the destinies of my country—a change which the spectacle before me rendered visible and tangible, so to speak.

The Imperial cortège was about to form; I took my place and soon reached the room reserved for the ceremony, only a few steps away from the Emperor, who stood before the throne. I had not seen him since the exciting days of the preceding autumn, and I was struck by his careworn appearance; he looked much older and as if he were deeply moved by the significance of the event. He took a few steps toward the deputies who had collected at the foot of the room and, unfolding a paper which he held in his hand, read his address in a rather low voice, but without embarrassment or hesitation, articulating each word distinctly and emphasizing a phrase here and there.

The discourse of the Emperor was listened to with the greatest attention and in perfect silence; it was easy to see that it produced a good impression upon the deputies. Inasmuch as, in the majority of the Czar's preceding addresses and in the acts recently promulgated by the Government, all mention of a constitution or of any limitation whatsoever of sovereign rights had been carefully avoided, it might well have been feared that the Emperor would profit by this occasion to proclaim once more the autocratic character of his power, so one may judge of the agreeable surprise with which the deputies listened to the following passage of the Imperial discourse :

“ For my part, I will protect in an inflexible manner the institutions which I have granted, for I am firmly convinced that you will employ all your forces to serve the fatherland with devotion, so as to give satisfaction to the needs of the peasants, so dear to my heart, and to promote the education of the people and the development of their prosperity, remembering always that the true prosperity of a State requires *not liberty alone*, but also *order*, based upon the principles of the *Constitution*.”

The prudent warning conveyed in these last words, particularly emphasized by the Emperor, did not prevent the deputies from appreciating the fact that the word “ Constitution ” had been heard for the first time from the lips of the sovereign. In spite of the good impression produced by the address, it was not greeted with any applause at the close, but this could easily be explained by the restraint to which the deputies were subjected by an atmosphere and surroundings that

were so strange to them. And on the whole it was the general opinion that the day had passed off extremely well.

The deputies then took possession of the Tauride Palace, which was placed temporarily at their disposal pending the construction of a special building for the use of the Douma.

The palace in which the first Russian representative assembly met was built by the Empress Catherine II. for the famous Potemkine, "Prince of the Tauride," in the neo-classic style introduced in Russia by the Scottish architect Cameron, and which has left its mark upon the majority of the great edifices erected at St. Petersburg at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. History has told of the power and wealth which Catherine's favour conferred upon Potemkine, styled "The Magnificent," after the manner of Lorenzo de Medici. The Tauride Palace, standing in the midst of its vast gardens, was the scene of the legendary fêtes offered by the favourite to his Imperial Mistress; later, it became for a time the residence of Emperor Alexander I., but for more than half a century it had been almost completely abandoned, and its superb halls, lined with their impressive columns, remained empty or were used for store-rooms; the offices of the palace were occupied by a crowd of small pensioners of the Court, and the gardens were opened to the public as a pleasure resort for the people of the quarter. In my youthful days, at the close of the reign of Alexander II., and under his successor, the Emperor Alexander III., a part of the gardens was reserved in winter for the exclusive use of the Court. *Montagnes de glace* were installed, and there was skating on the lake; several times a week a small circle, com-

posed of members of the Imperial family and their guests, met there, and those delightful reunions, the charm of which I shall never forget, were brightened by the grace and radiance of the Grand Duchess Maria Feodorowna, at that time the wife of the heir to the throne, afterwards the reigning Empress, and now the Empress Dowager, who presided over that series of informal gatherings, where all manner of etiquette was for the moment forbidden and forgotten.

This, then, was the scene, haunted by so many memories of other days, that was set for the meetings of the first Russian Douma ; the changes necessary to adapt it to its new uses had disfigured but little the palace of Potemkine, and, although certain arrangements and conveniences common to other European parliaments were lacking, the palace offered to the delegates of the Russian people a domicile of the most noble and imposing aspect.

The hall designed for the session of the Douma had formerly enclosed a winter-garden and was of great dimensions ; the interior arrangement was copied after the French Chamber of Deputies, the raised tribune of the President dominating that of the speaker and both facing the hemicycle formed by the benches of the deputies. The Ministers' bench, however, was not placed in the first row, as in France, but at the right of the President's tribune, fronting the deputies.

I mention these details because it has always seemed to me that the arrangement of the hall in which the sessions are to take place, and the outward form given to the debates by a certain arrangement, exert great influence upon the labours of an assembly. When organizing the Douma, the Government would have done well to introduce the forms adopted by the



assemblies of the Zemstvos (the local provincial councils), which dated from the liberal period of Emperor Alexander II., who evidently had in mind, when he prescribed them, that they would form the embryo of a future political representation of the nation. The Zemstvos were not provided with a tribune; the members, when addressing the house, spoke from their respective places, facing the presiding officer instead of their fellow members, as is the custom in the English House of Commons. The result was that the orators were less tempted to rely upon the effect of their eloquence and the debates were characterized by rather more familiarity. If this way of doing, which had been followed for more than half a century, had been adopted in the Douma, the many members of the Zemstvos present would perhaps have communicated to their colleagues their own habits of prudence and moderation in oratory. It is a matter of common knowledge that the mere fact of speaking from a tribune incites the orator to an excess of eloquence, which often exerts a harmful influence upon the deliberations of a young assembly, and I believe that I make no mistake in affirming that the use of the rostrum brought into the first rank of the Douma of 1906 certain personalities of demagogic tendencies, to the detriment of other elements more serious and more moderate.

It is a curious fact that the Government itself was to blame for this unfortunate result. Prior to the opening of the Douma, a high functionary, M. Trepoff (he who was for several weeks President of the Council in 1917, on the eve of the fall of the monarchy), was deputed to go the rounds of the European capitals for the purpose of studying the working of the different parliamentary assemblies. M. Trepoff brought back



from his trip a ready-made plan, based upon what he had observed at Paris, and it was adopted without criticism by the Government ; the very simple idea of continuing the forms already in use by the assemblies of the Zemstvos did not occur to the Russian bureaucrats, or, to speak more exactly, their inveterate hatred of these assemblies, which they chose to consider as hotbeds of revolutionary effort, caused them to shun anything that savoured of similarity to the manner of proceeding of the Zemstvos. In this matter, as, alas, in many others afterwards, the Russian bureaucracy gave evidence of its utter lack of comprehension, not only of the psychology of representative assemblies in general, but of the spirit of their own people.

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The collision between the bureaucratic Government and the elected assembly occurred, as we know, at the very first session of the Douma, and was followed by a series of conflicts which, after a three months' struggle, brought about its dissolution ; but before reciting the vicissitudes of this struggle I should like to outline the traits of the principal adversaries on either side.

I will not for the moment undertake the difficult task of portraying the Emperor Nicholas II., who was the central figure of the resistance which organized itself in defence of the monarchic principle against the encroachments of the Douma, but will confine myself to a description of the new Ministers, who were brought into prominence by the course of events and whose colleague I had most unwillingly become. A strange collection of functionaries they were, to be sure ; united to each other by no common interest nor programme,

if we except their antipathy to the new order of things and to the very principle of representative government.

At the head of the Ministry stood M. Goremykine, an old bureaucrat who even at that period had already been fifty years in the service of the State; everyone will remember the astonishment which greeted his re-appointment to the same high office a little while before the outbreak of the great European War; he himself was surprised at being called to power at so critical an epoch and compared himself to an old fur coat that one might take out of a box for protection against an unexpected bit of bad weather. Unfortunately, his metaphor was only too exact, for in 1906, as in 1914, that overcoat proved to be entirely worn out and unfit for sheltering the monarchy from the tempest which threatened it.

There was a striking contrast between the new head of the Government and Count Witte, who had just retired; the more the latter continued to dominate even his enemies by his talents and energies, in spite of the disappointments he had suffered during the concluding months of his tenure, the more did M. Goremykine pale into insignificance. What could have caused the Emperor to choose him for so important an office? The most plausible explanation was that he had known how to make himself personally agreeable to the Czarina, as a member of the different benevolent societies over which she presided. M. Goremykine piqued himself on being an accomplished courtier and affected the manners peculiar to old-time Court etiquette, but what appeared to please the Empress above all was the ostentation with which he displayed his ultra-monarchical sentiments.

The most notable representative of the old bureau-

cracy in the Cabinet was, beyond question, the Minister of Finance, M. Kokovtsoff. He became President of the Council after the assassination of M. Stolypine, and was succeeded in turn by M. Goremykine. Endowed with a prodigious capacity for labour and distinguished for his universally-recognized probity, he had passed through all grades of the official hierarchy and acquired vast experience, not only in financial matters, but in widely differing administrative branches. Shortly before, he had been entrusted with the negotiation at Paris of the great loan arranged by Count Witte, and had acquitted himself of the delicate task with entire success. Contrary to the majority of his colleagues, he was animated by no preconceived hostility to the Douma, and showed himself willing to collaborate sincerely with that body, but his ingrained bureaucratic habits and his lack of experience in dealing with parliamentary assemblies rendered this task difficult and often caused an irritation that could easily have been avoided with a little more diplomacy on his part. So it was that when he wished to point out on a certain occasion that the Ministers, according to the charter of 1905, were not accountable to the Chambers, but only to the Sovereign—instead of saying that there was no parliamentary government in Russia, he provoked the unanimous indignation of the Douma by declaring that there was “no Parliament in Russia, thank Heaven !” On the other hand, M. Kokovtsoff possessed the enormous advantage of being remarkably eloquent ; the long speeches which he made in the Douma, characterized not only by a perfect knowledge of his subject, but also by an impeccable oratory, were listened to with the closest attention, and, as a general thing, were favourably received by the deputies.

What can I say of most of the other Cabinet members ?

The portfolio of War was held by General Rüdiger, an old soldier who had had an insignificant career in the administrative branches of the Army, and whose short term in the Ministry left no trace; at the head of the Marine was that same Admiral Birileff who affixed his signature to the treaty of Bjorkoe without having read it, and whose almost total deafness made it impossible for him to take part in the debates of the Council of Ministers and the Douma. Other posts, no less important, were held by such pronounced reactionaries as M. Stichinsky, Minister of Agriculture, and M. Scheglovitoff, Minister of Justice, who became later the leader of the extreme right in the Council of the Empire; the functions of Attorney-General of the Holy Synod (*Ministre des Cultes*), so greatly dreaded in the time of the famous Pobiedonostzeff, were filled by Prince Schirinsky-Schichmatoff, a narrow devotee and a fanatical partisan of the autocratic regime, who was convinced that the granting of the Constitution was little short of sacrilege. Finally, to cap the climax, we were humiliated by the presence among us of M. Schwanebach, Comptroller of the Empire (or President of the Court of Accounts, ranking as a Minister in Russia), an insupportable babbler, belonging to that class of functionaries of German origin, often very laborious, but who succeeded in rising from a very humble *milieu* to the higher grades of the Russian hierarchy by dint of intrigue and vile procedure. M. Schwanebach made a speciality of violent criticisms directed against the financial administration of Count Witte, and procured their circulation about the Court by surreptitious means, hoping thus to attract the attention of the Emperor. In this way he had acquired the reputation, entirely unmerited, of being an able financier, and succeeded in getting appointed to an office for which he was quite

unfitted. Aspiring to fill many rôles, and with no qualms to interfere with his acceptance of the crookedest ones, M. Schwanebach became intimate with the Austrian Ambassador, Baron von Aerenthal, whose name will often occur in the following pages, and served him as an informer regarding the domestic affairs of Russia. It will be seen how great an influence his information exerted upon Austrian policies in relation to Russia, and how serious a wrong was caused to Russian interests.

I have so far omitted, intentionally, to mention the most remarkable of all the Cabinet members—M. Stolypine, Minister of the Interior, who was soon to replace M. Goremykine at the head of the Government. He deserves, in fact, more attention than any of his colleagues, and I will speak of him at greater length, not only because of the important rôle which he played in the political life of his country, but also because the close relations that I maintained with him up to the time when, for reasons which I will explain later, I was obliged to separate from him, enable me to trace his portrait in a manner that I dare hope will place in a true light his remarkable personality, so often misunderstood during his lifetime and calumniated after his death. I hasten to add that the reasons for our separation were purely of a political nature and did not lessen my great admiration for his moral character nor our personal friendship, which endured until the day of his death.

Pierre Stolypine was of gentle origin and belonged by birth and relationship to the high society of St. Petersburg; his father had occupied one of the great positions at Court and his mother was the daughter of General Prince Gortchakoff, who was commander-in-chief of the Russian Army at Sebastopol. From my youth upwards I was in cordial relations with his family, and I became



acquainted with him when we were finishing our studies, he at the University and I at the Imperial Lyceum. We were of about the same age, and I remember him as a charming young man, greatly loved and respected by his comrades, a little awkward and timid on account of a slight deformity; his right hand was stiff, as the result of an accident, and he made use of it with some difficulty. He married when very young, and in romantic fashion, the fiancée of his elder brother, who was killed in a duel and who on his death-bed placed his brother's hand in that of the young girl whom he tenderly loved. Instead of entering the military or civil service of the State, as was the custom of young men of his station in life, he retired to his properties, situated in one of the western provinces of Russia, and led the life of a rich country gentleman. After some time he accepted the duties of *Maréchal de la Noblesse* of his district. The marshals of the nobility—who were elected in the central provinces of Russia, or appointed by the Government in those provinces where the Russian elements were in conflict with the Polish—were not only expected to care for the interests of their body, but were clothed with general administrative functions of considerable extent. Having shown talent and energy in the performance of his duties, M. Stolypine was offered by the Government the post of Prefect of the Province of Saratoff, which was disturbed at that period by the revolutionary agitation. He decided to accept, in a spirit of duty to his country and his Sovereign rather than of ambition, and during the time that he occupied that difficult position he proved himself to be an excellent administrator, as well as a man of remarkable courage and *sang-froid*. Like most of the governors of provinces at that time, he was subjected to the danger of assassina-



tion, and on one occasion he seized and disarmed a revolutionary who had fired several shots at him without effect.

An anecdote is told of his presence of mind and his domination over a crowd. A mutiny had broken out in one of the quarters of the town at the instigation of certain revolutionary leaders, whose chief had lately been a soldier in one of the regiments of the local garrison, and M. Stolypine knew that he had been an officer's servant. Before resorting to force, the Governor resolved to try persuasion; arrived at the scene of the disorders, and perceiving in the front row of the crowd the aforesaid ringleader, he walked straight toward him and, before haranguing the mutineers, tossed him quickly his cloak as it slipped from his shoulders, and ordered him to hold it. The ex-orderly, accustomed to passive obedience, did as he was told before he realized it, and so lost in an instant, by the mere performance of a servile act, all prestige in the eyes of the mob, who presently became docile and yielded to the injunctions of the energetic Governor.

It was this very reputation for energy that commended M. Stolypine to the Emperor's choice for the office of Minister of the Interior. Totally out of his element in the bureaucratic world of the capital, this country gentleman of a rather provincial aspect appeared at first to play an insignificant part at the meetings of the Council of Ministers, but very soon his robust and original personality imposed itself strongly upon the routine functionaries who composed the majority of the Cabinet. As for me, I fell a victim to his charm at once, and was happy to find among my chance companions a man to whom I felt drawn by a communion of ideas and political convictions, for at that time M. Stolypine appeared to

me to be an especially sincere partisan of the new order of things, resolved to collaborate with the Douma in every way possible. Like him, for reasons which I will explain later, I was a stranger to the bureaucratic environment of St. Petersburg, and felt more in sympathy with the members of the provincial nobility and the Zemstvos, who had sent to the Douma some of their best representatives. The more M. Goremykine, sustained by the reactionary Ministers, emphasized his hostile attitude towards the assembly, the more closely I drew to M. Stolypine, with whom I formed, so to speak, the left wing of the Cabinet.

M. Stolypine was gifted with a very clear and healthy turn of mind that enabled him to comprehend the general significance of matters submitted to him for decision, and to master them in their details as well ; his capacity for work and his physical and moral power of endurance were prodigious. Accustomed as he was to the duties of a landowner, engaged in the development of vast properties, and, afterwards, to the activity in practical affairs that was requisite for the efficient administration of a province, he had little patience with bureaucratic routine and astonished everyone by the simplicity and good sense with which he attacked the most arduous problems of State, that had been the subject of many discussions at the meetings of the Council of Ministers.

A quality which was lacking, unfortunately, in M. Stolypine's character—and he was conscious of this himself—was a broad culture, in the European sense of the word. I do not mean to say that he was devoid of education, for he had pursued serious studies at the University, was well-read and well-informed in a general way ; but his opinions on the great political and social questions which he was called upon to consider had not

passed through the sieve of modern scientific criticism, and his state of mind was strongly influenced by certain intellectual currents which prevailed in Russia during his youth, and which may be summed up in what, by common consent, albeit improperly, is termed "Slavophilism."

Reserving for further and more detailed discussion a theory that has had so great an influence on the foreign and domestic policies of Russia, it will suffice for the present to say that Slavophilism condemns European civilization *en bloc*, as being corrupted by atheism and an excess of individualism. It attributes to the Russian nation the providential mission of creating a superior culture; in the domain of religion the Slavophiles proclaim that the Russian Orthodox Church alone has remained faithful to the precepts of Christ; and in the political domain they denounce the reforms which Peter the Great borrowed from the Occident and demand a return to the "national" systems of the Muscovite period. One of their principal doctrines has for its basis a claim that the commune, or *Mir*, is an original invention of Russian genius, and they find in communal proprietorship the essential foundation for the social and economic organization of Russia.

I will tell how, and thanks to what influences—after having been attracted by the arguments of the Slavophiles, together with almost all the other men of my generation and M. Stolypine's—I freed myself from their obscure teachings at a comparatively early period; as for M. Stolypine, without professing their faith to excess, he remained an adherent in many respects. If he had enjoyed the opportunity, as I did, to study the political and social life of Western Europe, I am certain that his clear and vigorous mind would have rejected all their

errors ultimately. In dealing with one of the questions most vital to Russia—that of agrarian organization—he did not hesitate to abandon the fatal theory of the *Mir*, cause of so many evils, and to adopt, against violent opposition, the system of small individual ownership. On the other hand, unfortunately, he was never able to rise superior to certain particularly dangerous conceptions of the Slavophiles, and so it was that, in spite of all my efforts to dissuade him, he veered towards a narrow and even exaggerated nationalism, which had the most lamentable consequences, and finally caused the rupture of our political relations.

But that which constituted the incontestable and undisputed superiority of M. Stolypine and established from the outset his ascendancy over his colleagues was a rare *ensemble* of qualities, both of heart and of character. I have referred already to the reputation that he had acquired for courage and *sang-froid*, of which he gave example later in a still more striking manner. These two traits were the expression of a vital energy that I have seldom seen equalled, especially in an individual of my race ; however, when meeting him for the first time, one was impressed and attracted by a simplicity and a sweetness which gave to his personality an irresistible charm, and, upon further acquaintance, one discovered in him a high-mindedness and a nobility of soul that the exercise of a power, which, at certain times, became even dictatorial, never in the least affected. His exalted and chivalrous conception of duty made of him a servant, devoted to the point of martyrdom, of his Sovereign and his country, but, at the same time, he was so proud of his name and jealous of his liberty that he ever maintained, toward a Court and a bureaucracy which regarded him in the light of an intruder and were more or less hostile

to him from the beginning, an attitude of reserve and independence to which one was little accustomed in that sphere, and which, I am sorry to say, was never appreciated at its worth by the Czar and his intimates.

The portrait which I have essayed to draw of this distinguished man would be incomplete were I to omit to mention his marvellous gift of oratory; in his first address to the Douma he revealed himself as a public speaker of extraordinary power. I use the word "revealed" because, up to that moment, no one had the slightest knowledge of his talent as an orator, and, in all probability, he himself was equally unconscious of possessing such a talent, for, prior to the meeting of the first Douma, there was no school in Russia in which parliamentary oratory could be acquired. We have seen that the debates in the assemblies of the *Zemstvos* were of a rather familiar and informal character, unfavourable to the cultivation of an oratorical style. The Russian, as we have since discovered, especially during the period following the fall of the monarchy, is not only endowed with a natural gift of eloquence, but is, alas, too much inclined to abuse this gift to the detriment of action. I have no hesitation in repeating that the use of the rostrum produced an unhealthy effect upon the debates of the Douma, but, in the case of M. Stolypine, it became a mighty instrument of government. In the assemblies of the *Zemstvos*, in which he had taken part before he became a Minister, he had been trained to speak without preparation, and the most remarkable speeches pronounced by him in the Douma were purely *extempore*. Oftener than not he mounted the tribune on the spur of a sudden impulse, without manuscript and even without notes, and for more than an hour held his hearers spell-bound by his fiery eloquence, accen-



tuated by an irresistible sincerity ; at such times a slight fault of enunciation, common to his mother's family, disappeared completely, and it was with a clear and vibrant voice that he pronounced those " winged words " with which he was so often inspired, and which became a rallying cry for thousands of Russians who read his speeches. It was an invaluable advantage for the Government to be able to oppose orators of the strength of M. Stolypine, and the clearness of M. Kokovtsoff, to their adversaries, who, although they counted among their number some very notable speakers in the first Douma, could boast of none that were superior or even equal to those two eloquent Ministers.

I will limit myself for the moment to this rapid sketch of the personality of M. Stolypine, whose figure will stand out in greater relief in the course of my recital of the events which marked the years of my collaboration with him ; but I cannot refrain from expressing my surprise at the scant justice which has been given him by certain writers, who have failed to present him in his true character to the European public. In France, M. Stolypine is known to most readers by M. Charles Rivet's book : " The Last Romanoff." This book, which is full of misstatements and false judgments, and of which the least that can be said is that one is astonished to recognize as its author a French journalist who was under great obligations to the Government during his stay of several years in Russia, has a chapter devoted to M. Stolypine which is particularly marred by prejudice. M. Rivet deliberately charges him with acts and tendencies which, in reality, he combated with the utmost energy and which it is impossible to impute to him with the least regard for truth. I will not stop to refute these charges point by point, for I am quite sure that the pages



which are to follow will demonstrate their falsity sufficiently.

In Dr. Dillon's book, "The Eclipse of Russia," instructive as it is, I find, among other subjects on which I entertain different opinions from its talented and clear-sighted author, that he, too, fails to treat the activity of M. Stolypine with proper consideration, in that he virtually passes it over in silence. Upon reading that work, so rich in documentary evidence, but, alas, so often partial in its conclusions, one cannot but be surprised that a description of the epoch of Russia's political history which was dominated by the personality of M. Stolypine contains scarcely any mention of his name. I can only explain this by the supposition that Dr. Dillon was so intent upon glorifying Count Witte (for which I would be the last to reproach him), and knew so well the profound dislike that his hero felt toward M. Stolypine, that he preferred to omit all reference to a subject regarding which Count Witte's judgment impressed him as being unfair and open to question.

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When, after having come in contact with the *personnel* composing M. Goremykine's heterogeneous Cabinet, I turned my attention to the Douma, the spectacle of that assembly's strange composition presented itself to me as being equally disconcerting. I have already told how I was struck by the great number of peasants among the deputies who figured at the ceremony attending the opening of the Douma at the Winter Palace. According to the terms of the electoral law, the Douma was to have 524 members, but the elections not having yet terminated in certain parts of the Empire, there were not over

500 present at the time of its inauguration. Of this number some 200 belonged to the peasant class ; next came the Cadets, who, for reasons which I have before explained, had gained a signal victory over the Conservatives and over the Moderate Liberals, or Octobrists, as well. The Cadet party, of pronounced radical tendencies, very compact and strongly organized, counted 161 members, and was reinforced by two groups, less radical in their ideas, but who voted invariably with the Cadets : the " Party of Democratic Reforms " and the " Party of Legal Order." These two groups were not strong numerically, but they comprised some striking personalities in their ranks. The Moderate Liberal, or Octobrist, party was represented by a mere handful of deputies who were scarcely to be distinguished from the Conservatives, together with whom they hardly exceeded thirty in number. Of Socialists there were only seventeen, and even they had not been elected as such, for the two avowed revolutionary parties, the " Revolutionary-Socialists " and the " Socialist-Democrats," had declined to take part in the elections, demanding the meeting of a constituent assembly and integral universal suffrage, as well as the boycott of a Douma founded upon the charter of 1905. The national-autonomist groups : Polish, Lithuanian, Esthonian, Lett, and those of the western provinces, numbered all together seventy members, and were of democratic tendencies with the exception of the Polish group, which was Conservative but, for national reasons, joined the others in opposition to the Government. Finally, there were a certain number of deputies who belonged to no party, and were undecided how to cast their votes at the start, but ended by giving support to the ranks of the opposition.

The salient characteristic of the first Douma, there-

fore, was an Opposition *bloc*, embracing more than half of its membership. This *bloc*, composed of different groups, was entirely controlled by the Cadets, and to counteract this formidable Opposition, there was no clearly-defined Conservative element, and no Moderate Liberal group of any consequence. But, apart from all the rest, there rose a confused and formless mass, composed of two hundred peasants, diversified only here and there by their village "popes," long-haired and hirsute-faced, who differed but little in appearance and mentality from their companions, the tillers of the soil.

The introduction of this peasant mass into the Douma had been the pet idea of the Government, and, with this object in view, the elections had been regulated by an electoral law, whose responsible author was M. Boulyguine, a mediocre bureaucrat, who had given his name to the first project of a constitution, which had never gone into effect. The law had then been re-touched and completed by the Government of Count Witte; it was prodigiously complicated and artificial, and was designed to favour the peasant class to the disadvantage of all other classes in the country. The Government hoped thereby to benefit by the presence in the Douma of an element to be depended on for its conservative spirit, its loyalty to the person of the Czar, and its docility to the voice of the established authority and the official Church. Never did the bureaucrats who ruled the destinies of Russia commit a greater blunder, nor one which was more fatal to the very cause which they had at heart, for, as will be seen presently, the peasants entered the Douma possessed of the fixed idea that they were to obtain a division of the land in favour of their class. Profoundly ignorant of all the other questions that were to come before the

Douma, and indifferent to the political liberties demanded by the Liberals, they were ready to support any party that would promise them the complete realization of their agrarian aspirations; so, inasmuch as the Cadets had inscribed at the head of their programme not only the distribution among the peasants of the lands belonging to the Crown, the Imperial family and the convents, but also the forced expropriation of land held by the great proprietors, and even that of the lesser landowners, it was clear that the Radical Party could count upon the support of the great majority of peasant deputies. Under these auspices, and with the participation of the Socialists, the so-called "Labour Party" was formed—ranking second in the Douma in point of numerical importance—composed principally of peasants professing agrarian socialism, and counting about a hundred members. The other peasants, even those who considered themselves as belonging to the Conservative Party, fell more and more under the sway of the Cadets as the agrarian question grew rapidly to be the chief subject of debate in the Chamber. As is well known, this question was the cause of the final clash between the Government and the first Douma, resulting in its dissolution.

M. Stolypine recognized the Government's mistake and its fatal consequences at the first glance, and I shared his opinion. But what else could have been expected of bureaucrats confined to the atmosphere of the Ministries of St. Petersburg, and total strangers to the rapid growth of new ideas and the intensity of life that was manifesting itself in the interior of the country? Believing that they already held in check the revolutionary spirit of the "intellectuals" of the large cities by the methods of the police, they were

for the moment concerned with the task of stemming the rising tide of Liberalism in the Zemstvos, and as regarded the peasants, the illusions which prevailed in the Governmental circles of the capital were half a century old. They cherished the innocent belief that the peasant was the natural bulwark of the Throne and of the Altar, and, incredible as it may seem, they took no account of his agrarian appetite and the anarchistic tendencies which had become so patent to every intelligent observer during the years just passed. That functionaries of the type of M. Boulyguine should share these illusions, I repeat, is nothing to cause astonishment, but that Count Witte, clear-sighted and practical statesman as he was, could have fallen into the same error, I have never to this day been able to comprehend. Had not Count Witte been president of the great commission which had studied the agrarian question a short time previous, and had he not then an opportunity to gauge the intensity of the aspirations of the peasant class? I have often tried, without success, to penetrate this mystery by questioning, now Count Witte himself, and again his principal co-workers; only lately I hoped to find the key of the enigma in Dr. Dillon's book, but that author, in spite of his familiarity with the most hidden thoughts of his distinguished friend, limits himself to a mere record of his error without attempting to explain it. So the riddle remains unsolved and, to my mind, weighs heavily upon the memory of Count Witte, for it was this fundamental mistake which was the chief cause of the shipwreck that overtook the first Douma and of the difficulties which ensued therefrom.

We have just seen how curious was the composition of the Douma; it was no less curious that the two



leading parties which had contested the elections—the Cadets and the Octobrists—were not represented in the assembly by their declared chiefs. The Cadet Party, which had triumphed all along the line, had failed to have their leader, Professor Milioukoff, admitted. He had been elected by a heavy majority at St. Petersburg, but was excluded by the Government for some technical reason which I do not remember. The Government derived no particular advantage, however, for M. Milioukoff continued, none the less, to direct his party from the outside, and, in fact, I have always thought that his presence in the Chamber would have been less troublesome to the Cabinet than his activity in the lobbies, especially as the Cadets did not lack able representatives on the floor of the Douma, such as Professor Mourontzoff (President of the first Douma), Messrs. Golovine (who became President of the second), Roditcheff, Nabokoff, Vinaver (the best three orators belonging to the party), Prince Schakovskoy, Messrs. Petrounkievitch, Kokoschkine and Hertenstein. The two affiliated Liberal Parties—those of “Democratic Reform” and of “Legal Order”—although so small in number as to suggest somebody’s remark that they were like a “general staff without any troops,” were also well represented by men of acknowledged ability; the first by its founder, Professor Kovalevski, since deceased, who had many friends in France, and by General Kouzmine-Karavaieff, one of the best orators of the Douma; the second by its leader, Count Heyden, who had occupied a high station at Court and whose moral influence was universally recognized. As for the Octobrists, their two chiefs, Messrs. Goutchkoff and D. Schipoff, had been beaten in the elections; the Conservatives had sent no one of any importance, and



were merged, more or less, with the Octobrists ; among the Moderate Liberals were to be noticed Messrs. Stakhovitch and Lvoff (not to be confounded with Prince Lvoff, future President of the Provisional Government, who was not a member of the first Douma), but I cannot remember whether they were registered as belonging to the Octobrist group or to that of " Legal Order." The Polish " Kolo " was headed by M. Dmovski, chief of the Polish National Democratic Party, who still plays an important part in his country's affairs, and the Bishop of Vilna, Baron Ropp, both orators of the first order. Finally, the Labour Party was led by M. Aladine, a brilliant speaker, who affected a certain elegance, and, with the aid of the red flower which he seldom forgot to wear in his buttonhole, did much to relieve the monotony of the grey mass of peasants who composed the great majority of his party.

The Council of the Empire—which had corresponded under the old regime to the first Napoleon's *Conseil d'Etat*, and in which were framed and discussed the most important laws and measures pertaining to domestic policy, to be submitted thereafter to the Emperor for his decision—was transformed into an Upper Chamber, composed in equal number of members appointed by the Emperor and of those elected ; the former, although subject to confirmation by the Czar at the beginning of each year, were to serve for life, and comprised, almost without exception, bureaucrats who had occupied high positions in the civil and military hierarchy : former Ministers of State, Governors-General, commanders of army corps, ambassadors, Supreme Court judges, etc. The elected members were designated for a term of nine years by the high clergy, the assemblies of the nobility, the academy of sciences and the universities,

the chambers of commerce and the Bourse, the manufacturing interests and, finally, the greater number by the Zemstvos in those parts of the Empire where those assemblies existed, and everywhere else—as, for instance, in Poland, Lithuania, the western provinces and those of the Baltic—by the landed proprietors.

By virtue of its composition, the Council of the Empire was in reality a more modern assemblage than most of the upper houses of Europe, in countries enjoying constitutional government, as, for example, the House of Lords or the Italian Senate. In spite of my little admiration for the Russian bureaucracy, I must admit that among the members of the Council there were a number of men of great ability and eminent worth. Some of them had been in office during the liberal reign of the Emperor Alexander II., among others, my wife's uncle, Count Pahlen, who, at the age of thirty, had been chosen by the Czar to introduce into Russia, in his capacity of Minister of Justice, the judiciary reform which is recognized as one of the great acts of Alexander II.'s reign. Count Pahlen was a gentleman of the old school, of most distinguished bearing and appearance, laden with honours and a great favourite at Court, but noted for his absolute independence toward the Government, and universally respected for his integrity and nobility of character. In company with him were such men as Count Solsky, M. Goloubeff, the two brothers Sabouroff (one of whom had been Ambassador to Berlin until he was obliged to leave his post by reason of his antagonism toward Prince Bismarck), Gerhardt, Koni and others, all bureaucrats, but gifted with large views, wide knowledge and great experience in public affairs. It was a curious thing that the elder bureaucrats were distinguished for their

liberal spirit, or, in other words, the spirit of the reign of Emperor Alexander II., while the younger functionaries were imbued with the reactionary ideas of the later period of Alexander III.

A place apart in the Council of the Empire was occupied by Count Witte, who had just left power, and whose future attitude toward the Government was a matter of guess-work. In the next chapter I purpose to sketch the portrait of that powerful figure, whose political rôle appeared to be interrupted only for a time.

While the elected members of the Council of the Empire were to serve for nine years, a third of the membership was designated by lot every year to be replaced by an equal number newly chosen, under the same conditions as their predecessors. For this reason I cannot recall with certainty the composition of the first lot of members belonging to this category, and it is possible, therefore, that I may mention some persons who did not enter the Council until later. The Academy and the Universities were represented by such eminent professors as Prince Galitzine, Messrs. Oldenburg, Grimm and Tagantzef; the commercial and manufacturing industries and the Bourses by men of equal note in their respective branches, among whom I will cite Messrs. Krestovnikoff, Avdakoff and Timiriazeff ; the nobility, the Zemstvos and the landed proprietors sent some of their best representatives, the greater part of whom joined the party of the Centre, *i.e.*, the Moderate Liberal Party, which was presided over by one of my intimate friends, Prince Pierre Troubetzkoy, formerly Maréchal de la Noblesse of Moscow, destined, alas, to perish soon after by the hand of an assassin. Among the members belonging to these last three categories I numbered several other friends of

long standing, as, for example, Prince Boris Vassiltchikoff, Maréchal de la Noblesse of Novgorod, all imbued with the best liberal traditions of their class. To conclude, the Poles were represented by several very distinguished and enlightened men, almost all good orators, such as M. Kozvin-Milevsky, well known in Paris, Count Wielepolski, Messrs. Skirmant and Schebeke.

On the whole, at the moment of which I am now speaking, the Council of the Empire had not begun to have the character, which distinguished it later, of an assemblage guided by reactionary principles, or ready to serve as a docile instrument in the hands of the Government. Its transformation was effected little by little, thanks to the pains which were taken in high places to prevent the appointment of anyone who did not belong to the parties of the Right. As far as concerned its procedure during the first session, the Council of the Empire not only gave proof of great independence and of a broad and enlightened spirit, but, as we shall see, it strenuously opposed the incoherent Cabinet of M. Goremykine, and did not in the slightest degree deserve the hostility *a priori* that was shown by the Douma.

In spite of the well-established custom by virtue of which the Ministers of State, immediately after taking office, were appointed members of the Council of the Empire, I did not enter that assembly until two years later, on account of the opposition that the reactionaries made to my candidature, and because of their influence upon the Emperor. It was only after an energetic protest from M. Stolypine that these obstacles were overcome, with the result that I entered the Council at the same time with my brother, and we both joined the party of the Centre.

## CHAPTER IV

### COUNT WITTE

I AM now about to take up a most difficult task: the portrayal—which I desire to make as faithful as possible—of that great statesman, Count Witte. Few Ministers have been more diversely judged and with greater passion. He had his share of enemies and implacable detractors, but he had also, and still retains, most enthusiastic panegyrists, who spare no superlatives when eulogizing his character and his deeds. None knew better than he how to inspire his friends with the warmest and truest devotion, a conspicuous example of which is shown by Dr. E. J. Dillon, in his book, “The Eclipse of Russia,” which he dedicated “to the memory of my friend, Russia’s unique statesman, S. I. Witte.” For my part, I never fell under the glamour of Count Witte’s powerful personality, nor, on the other hand, did I experience the feeling of violent aversion that he inspired in so many of his contemporaries, notably Emperor Nicholas, who never was able to conceal his antipathy. Not having been on intimate terms with Count Witte, I feel that I am in a position to portray him with entire freedom and in a manner that I will endeavour to make as objective as possible.

The most striking points in his personal appearance



were his great height and massive shoulders. He stood half a head taller than most other men, even in Russia, where men are generally of high stature, and his whole frame suggested something that might have been shaped by the rude blows of an axe. His features would have had character, were it not for a malformation, almost a fracture, of the nose, which gave him a certain resemblance to the portraits of Michelangelo. His bearing was rough and apparently so by intention; perhaps he affected a brusque manner to hide the embarrassment which he felt at Court and in the high society of the capital, a *milieu* to which he never became accustomed. But in spite of his rather shabby appearance and the awkwardness of his manners, he produced, on the whole, a great impression of force and originality.

One thing which always affected me disagreeably in Count Witte was his voice, the notes of which sounded out of tune, as it were, and especially his pronunciation, acquired during his youth, when he lived at Odessa, where the population is a mixed one, comprising Greeks, Roumanians and other meridionals. That pronunciation, as well as a rather common manner of speech, was displeasing to my ear, habituated as I was to the pure and elegant tongue perfected by our great national poet, Pouschkine, and spoken by Russians belonging to the cultivated classes of the two capitals, especially Moscow.

Count Witte was, as is well known, a "self-made man"; not that his birth was exceptionally humble, or his father, who was a provincial functionary of foreign extraction (Dutch, I believe), had attained quite a high position in the Government employ, and his mother belonged to one of the best families in Russia; but, after finishing his education in his native province,



he did not enter the bureaucratic career, which was the only road to high official rank and honours at that period. He went into the service of the powerful private company which operated the south-western railroads of Russia, and it was in that environment that the first twenty years of his activity were spent. Endowed as he was with rare energy, he passed through all branches of the service, without disdaining the most humble duties, even such as those of station-master, and thanks to his thorough knowledge of railroad operation and management, when he was summoned to St. Petersburg by Emperor Alexander III., as an expert on the railway question that was then so important in Russia, he easily dominated the routine bureaucracy of the capital by his practical experience and good-sense.

At St. Petersburg his untiring activity overstepped the bounds of his speciality, and he became an authority, not only on railway matters, but on the whole economic life of the country; his rise in the official hierarchy was marvellously rapid, and it was only a few years after his arrival at the capital when he was placed at the head of the Finance Ministry, a position not only very influential in itself, but to which he imparted a particular importance. He occupied that post, with two years of interruption (1903-1905), until the day when, as we have seen, he became chief of the first Constitutional Government of Russia.

Count Witte's mind always turned toward the practical side of things; his political and economic conceptions, even the most far-reaching, were not as a general rule inspired by a comprehensive view of the functions of a State, nor by the great laws which govern human society. This explains in part, I think, some of

the errors that he committed, but although I have been struck more than once by his lack of superior culture and certain general fundamental ideas, I do not go so far as to agree with M. Bompard, who, in a recent article in the *Revue de Paris*, asserted that Count Witte was devoid of the most elementary knowledge of financial science, and that he had never pursued his studies of the theory of economics beyond the reading of a treatise by M. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu.

In spite of these statements, M. Bompard recognizes in Count Witte "an administrator of superior intellectual power, a financier of wide views and an eminent statesman." This judgment does honour to the impartial spirit of the former French Ambassador at St. Petersburg, whose political adversary Count Witte never ceased to be, but it seems to me that it does not render entire justice to his genius. I do not hesitate to use the word genius, for Count Witte undoubtedly displayed much more than mere talent in certain phases of his activity.

Can one rightly say, as Dr. Dillon does in his book, that Count Witte was "the only statesman that Russia has produced since Peter the Great"? I do not think so; his work shows too flagrant lapses, and some of his mistakes have been too cruelly expiated by Russia to permit one to assign him so high a place in the history of his country. I believe it would be more just to say that there were certain hours in his career when, by the audacity of his conceptions, and by the energy with which he carried them out, he put himself on a par with the greatest statesmen of all time and all nations; but at other times, and, unhappily, on some critical occasions, he was strangely inferior to himself. This was due rather to deficiencies of character than of

intellect, for, in contradistinction to M. Stolypine, he revealed himself as a man whose moral qualities were not always up to the standard of his mental faculties.

Without attempting a comprehensive view of the prodigious work accomplished by Count Witte, one is immediately struck by the fact that it did not proceed from a consistent scheme of action in the realm of political economics, but presented widely differing and often contradictory phases. To explain this anomaly, it is indispensable to imagine oneself under the influences to which he was subject during his fifteen years of untiring activity in public life.

Until the promulgation of the Constitution of 1905 there was no homogeneous Cabinet in Russia; there was no President of the Council of Ministers, nor even any permanent Council, properly speaking. The Emperor, on certain occasions, called the Ministers together under his presidency, to consider one or another question of particularly grave importance, but such occasions were rare, and, as a general rule, each Minister worked separately with the Emperor, and accepted no other mandate than that which emanated from the Sovereign. The result was that the Ministers not only had no common bond of unity between them, but considered it a point of honour to maintain an attitude of complete independence to each other. The Czar Alexander III., jealous of his autocratic power, carefully restricted his Ministers to this way of doing, and any attempt on their part to confer together for the purpose of concerted action was treated by him as an attack upon his prerogatives. Emperor Nicholas made no change in this state of affairs, and even emphasized it by calling his Ministers together less often than his father had done. If one also considers that

the Ministers were not subject to any Parliamentary control, and that all effort of the Zemstvos to extend their sphere of activity was severely repressed, it is a wonder that such a system did not bring about, long before, a complete disorganization of the vastest empire known to modern times.

No sooner had Count Witte become Minister of Finance than he gave evidence of a tendency to dominate all the other members of the Cabinet, and to become, *de facto*, if not *de jure*, the real head of the Russian Government. In the pursuit of this object he was strengthened, not only by his powerful will and his incontestable superiority over his colleagues, but still more by the fact that, as Grand Treasurer of the Empire, he held all the departments of the State subject to an indirect dependence, for Emperor Alexander III. placed absolute confidence in him, and refused to sanction any credit of which he disapproved.

But it was not long before this indirect supremacy failed to satisfy the ambition of Count Witte, who sought to extend his ceaseless activity to every ramification of the political and economic life of the country, and finally succeeded. Then a phenomenon, strange and incomprehensible to the European mind, was witnessed—that of a Finance Minister who had created, little by little, a State within a State, and who had superimposed, so to speak, upon the many different organs of the Government, other organs of similar functions, but deriving their powers directly and solely from his Ministry. In this way Count Witte had the control of an innumerable crowd of functionaries of all denominations and all ranks, a network of schools of lower and even higher grades, a vast territory—a veritable kingdom, in fact, of which he was sole master—an

army, a fleet, even a diplomatic service. Furthermore, on account of his constant tendency to extend indefinitely the power of the State to the detriment of a personal initiative and activity which was still in its infancy in Russia, one may say that for some ten years he was the real master of the 160,000,000 inhabitants of the Empire. Truth compels me to say that the greater part of the elements composing the system created by him were better organized, performed their functions more perfectly, and were imbued with a broader and more modern spirit than the corresponding Government services, but it is easy to understand, nevertheless, that so paradoxical an organization of the State involved a great waste of force and gave rise to a chaotic condition of affairs that was eventually fatal to Russia, especially when Count Witte was no longer there to sustain it with his all-powerful energy.

I have already remarked that Count Witte's compatriots have never done justice to his work. It seems to me that a Minister who has at his credit these three achievements—the monetary reform, the Treaty of Portsmouth and the Constitutional Charter of 1905—deserves to be ranked with the greatest statesmen, not only of Russia, but of the world.

The first of these, *i.e.*, the establishment of a metallic circulating medium and the fixing of exchange, would of itself have sufficed to give him that place. This reform, which met with formidable obstacles and owed its success solely to the indomitable will of Count Witte, enabled Russia to go through the Russo-Japanese War and the revolutionary year of 1905 without undergoing a financial crisis. I have already expressed my opinion of the Peace of Portsmouth, and have no hesitation in qualifying it as an unhoped-for success for Russia that



no *diplomate de carrière* could have achieved. Finally, the Manifesto of the 17th October, in spite of the late hour at which it was wrung from Emperor Nicholas II., undoubtedly saved the Russian monarchy for the time from the ruin that overtook it twelve years later for having abandoned the road laid out by its great Minister.

While I do not feel competent to sit in judgment upon the economic policy of Count Witte, I believe I am not wrong in saying that it calls for some very serious criticisms. I have mentioned his tendency to stretch beyond all reason the attributes of the State in economic matters, thanks to a series of measures like the systematic purchase of the railroads, the exploitation *en régie* of the vast domains of the Crown, a severe supervision of the manufacturing industry, etc., in consequence of which the State ended by controlling, and even almost completely absorbing, the private initiative and energy that was still so undeveloped in the country. But apart from this exaggerated *étatisme*, one may well ask if the very foundations of the economic framework of Russia were not weakened by some of the measures for which Count Witte was responsible.

In his book, "The Eclipse of Russia," Dr. Dillon says that Count Witte realized the feebleness and lack of cohesion of the different elements composing Czarism, and believed that these elements could be consolidated and bound together by the force of a grandiose economic transformation which would create powerful national interests and would be the instrument of a veritable national re-education. To my mind, if these lines do not characterize Count Witte's general plan—for it has always seemed to me that he lacked precisely any consistent plan—they do at least describe the tendency of his political activities. The weakness and disunion of



the elements constituting the Russian Empire could not escape the attention of any statesman, even the least observing, and were bound to reveal themselves in fatal fashion later, when the monarchy fell ; but I belong to a political school which has always sought a remedy for this state of things, not in State control *à outrance*, nor in the strengthening of a central officialdom, nor even in the artificial stimulation of material interests, but in the development of local self-government, in a representative regime built up from that principle, and, finally, in the satisfaction of the reasonable aspirations of distinct nationalities and the systematic inculcation of a spirit of personal initiative in the minds of the people.

There is a consensus of opinion that one of Count Witte's principal merits was the immense effort which he made for the development, or rather the creation, of a great manufacturing industry in Russia. Without depreciating the brilliant results that he achieved in that direction, one may ask if he did not, in vulgar parlance, "put the cart before the horse" ? In giving all his attention to the workshop, did not Count Witte fail to comprehend the character, essentially agricultural, of Russia and her need of a preparatory phase, in which to develop her rural industries with the object of perfecting the raw material of agriculture and so benefiting the former ? And was it not due to the financial policy of Count Witte—notably the colossal growth of the foreign debt, contracted for the purchase of the railways, whose maintenance and operation demanded enormous sums of ready money—that great quantities of agricultural products had to be exported, thereby disturbing the economic balance and even affecting the physical condition of the rural population ? In short, the political

school to which I belong always maintained that the creation of a numerous labouring class, crowded together in the cities, and forming the revolutionary element *par excellence*, as was proved in 1917, ought to have been preceded by an extensive agrarian reform, in the sense of a development of small private ownership. This would not only have increased the product of the soil, but would have inculcated in the peasant mind a spirit of conservatism which it totally lacked.

I will only mention, in passing, one of Count Witte's measures which gave rise to a great deal of controversy : the monopoly of the sale of spirits. Personally, I am of the opinion that this measure, considered as a palliative, was good in itself and showed a marked improvement over the preceding state of affairs ; but is it not to be regretted that, instead of being satisfied with this palliative, Count Witte did not apply his immense energy to the abolishment of a fiscal system based upon alcoholism, and consequently upon the demoralization and impoverishment of the masses ? And can one help being moved to admiration by the *beau geste* of the unfortunate Emperor Nicholas, who, at the beginning of the world-war, dared to suppress with one stroke of the pen this source of so much physical and moral evil in Russia ?

A subject with which I feel myself more competent to deal is that of the Russian policy in the Far East. Count Witte exerted a great influence upon that policy, and must be considered responsible for it, if not solely, at least in great measure. The rôle he played in the drama was a most complex and varied one.

If one wishes to locate the initial act which led to the unfortunate war between Russia and Japan, it will be necessary, in my opinion, to go back to the decision adopted by the Russian Government, at Count Witte's

behest, to push the main line of the Trans-Siberian railway through to Vladivostok by way of Chinese territory, thus shortening the distance considerably, but, at the same time, creating on the eastern confines of the Empire a singularly complicated and dangerous situation. It was the first thing to awaken the suspicions of Japan and to reveal to that Power the imperialistic ambitions of Russia in the Far East. Having been at all times a stout partisan of a European policy for Russia, I never was in favour of anything that tended towards transferring the field of Russian action to a point so distant from the centre of our traditional interests, and thus weakening our position in Europe. It has always seemed to me that Siberia should be considered above all as a reserve against the day when Russia might find herself obliged to overflow the boundaries of Europe and seek an outlet there for her surplus population and energies. But that day was still distant, and meanwhile it was at least premature to force, in so conspicuous a manner and across foreign territory, an access to the vast theatre of the Pacific, where we could not and ought not to play other than a secondary part at that hour.

I am, however, quite willing to recognize the audacity and ability with which Count Witte carried out his plan, and I further admit that, if it had stopped there, the Trans-Siberian railway, under his firm control, might have become an instrument of economic development for Russia, but, unhappily, it was completely spoiled by her subsequent political activity in the Far East, and above all by the seizure of the Chinese peninsula of Liao-Tong, with the ports of Dalny and Port Arthur.

I hasten to add that Count Witte was personally opposed to that policy, which was in reality the outgrowth of a plan conceived by the German Emperor for

the seizure of Kiao-Chiau. It was during his first visit to St. Petersburg after the accession of Nicholas II. to the throne that the Kaiser made his host promise not to oppose the *coup de main* that he had in view, and suggested that the Czar should follow his example by taking possession of the extremity of the peninsula of Liao-Tong. Count Mouravieff, who was at that time Minister of Foreign Affairs, and who was as destitute of forethought as he was ignorant of affairs in general and of the affairs of the Far East in particular, was fascinated at once by a scheme which promised to increase his personal prestige, and it was from his own lips that I learned what had passed in the council convoked by the Czar for the discussion of this question. . Of all the members present Count Mouravieff was the only one who supported Emperor Nicholas in his project, which was opposed by the other Ministers, and most vigorously by Count Witte, who was perfectly well aware of the danger involved in such a flagrant violation of the integrity of China. The Czar deferred to the opinion of the majority and the scheme was temporarily abandoned, but Count Mouravieff refused to admit defeat, and succeeded later in persuading the Emperor that, according to secret information, a British squadron was about to take Port Arthur as a reply to the seizure of Kiao-Chiau by the Germans, and that it was necessary at any cost to get ahead of England. The result was that Admiral Douba-soff, Commandant of the Russian naval forces in the Far East, received from Emperor Nicholas a direct order to enter Port Arthur and to hoist the Russian flag. Thereupon Count Mouravieff took great credit to himself for having gained so signal a victory over Count Witte, and for having won the two Chinese ports for Russia.

If Russia had been a constitutional State, or if it had even possessed a homogeneous and unified Government, a Minister who was opposed to so decisive and important a step would have resigned. Count Witte did nothing of the kind, and even profited by the occasion to extend more widely than ever the circle of his powers. Enlarging the primitive scope of the Trans-Siberian, he carried the terminus of the line from the Russian port of Vladivostok to the extremity of the Chinese peninsula of Liao-Tong. Under pretext of providing for the needs of the railway, the Russian Government, guided entirely in this matter by him, procured from China, not only the lease of Port Arthur and Dalny, but also of a wide zone of territory on each side of the track.

Taking Cecil Rhodes as a model and copying his rôle as an "Empire Builder," Count Witte made of this zone, which was subject to the exclusive control of his Ministry, a domain over which he ruled with quasi-sovereign powers. In that vast territory new cities sprang up, like Harbin, and new ports, like Dalny. He had a veritable army under his command, in the form of a guard for the protection of the railway, as well as a river and ocean fleet. A multitude of functionaries, under his direction and independent of the central authority of the Empire, administered the leased territory, which constituted, in fact, an important colonial possession on the remote confines of Russia in Asia, of which he was sole master.

It was inevitable that an experiment of this nature should weigh heavily upon the rest of the Empire, for, while the work of Cecil Rhodes met the needs of England by providing an outlet for its surplus population, capital and energies, Count Witte's enterprise was of a purely artificial character, satisfactory only to the unbounded



ambition of that statesman, and anything but helpful to the true welfare of Russia, under-populated as it was and undeveloped technically and economically. The effect was to absorb countless millions in money and a wealth of labour that could have been employed with infinitely greater profit in the interior of Russia.

Count Witte's Manchurian undertaking, useless and even harmful as it was *per se*, was particularly fatal from the point of view of Russia's foreign relations, and it may be considered as the primary cause of the Russo-Japanese War. If the Government had been content to use the extremity of the Liao-Tong peninsula as a base for its Pacific fleet (although the Russian port of Vladivostok was amply sufficient for that purpose), it is probable that Japan would have accommodated herself to the situation in time; but the occupation of a part of Manchuria, in addition to the peninsula, gave rise to apprehensions that soon grew into serious complications and finally brought about the collision between Russia and Japan, for it was the attack of the Boxers on the Chinese Eastern railway which led to the occupation of Manchuria by the Russian troops in the year 1900, and this, in turn, became one of the chief points of the Russo-Japanese dispute.

When, not long afterwards, the Manchurian mistake was supplemented by the mad adventure of Messrs. Bezobrazoff, Abaza and company in Korea and on the Yalu, the hour for the settlement of accounts between Russia and Japan was merely hastened thereby, for, I repeat, the germ of the Russo-Japanese conflict is to be found in the imperialistic policy of Count Witte. The Korean adventure, nevertheless, was the immediate cause of the war. Count Witte, as well as his friend Count Lamsdorff, openly opposed the band of courtiers and



irresponsible schemers who succeeded in drawing the Czar into it and in playing the rôle of an occult governing power, which, for the time being, ousted both the Finance Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs from the command of Far-Eastern matters. But while recognizing the far-sightedness shown by Count Witte and Count Lamsdorff in the premises, it is impossible to absolve them from all responsibility for the outcome. It is pertinent to call attention, for the second time, to the fact that, in any country possessing a well-organized Government, Ministers finding themselves in a similar situation would have presented their resignations, and would not have remained in office unless they received satisfaction. Instead of this, we see Count Witte staying tranquilly at his post and watching, as a disapproving but resigned spectator, a policy that he is powerless to prevent. As for his *alter ego*, Count Lamsdorff, he not only did not resign, but, when criticized for remaining in power under the circumstances, he advanced the stupefying theory that in Russia the Minister of Foreign Affairs could not quit his post until dismissed by his Sovereign, and that his sole function was to study the questions pertaining to the Empire's foreign relations and present his conclusions to the Emperor, who, in his quality of autocrat, would decide for or against, and his decision would thereupon be obligatory for the Minister. Count Witte's ideas were certainly too advanced to permit of his sharing such an opinion, so it must be concluded that his anxiety to remain in power overbalanced all other considerations and prevented him, not only from resigning his portfolio, but even protesting to the Emperor in a sufficiently vigorous manner against a policy which he knew must end in catastrophe.

This lack of firmness of character, which marked certain

phases of Count Witte's career in the period preceding the war, brings out in all the clearer relief his energy and statesmanlike qualities as they were displayed during the disastrous progress of the campaign. Dr. Dillon includes in his book a letter addressed by Count Witte to Emperor Nicholas, under date of the 28th of February, 1905, in which are set forth with a frankness and exactitude worthy of the highest praise the reasons why it was imperative to make immediate overtures for peace with Japan. In the same letter he insisted, with still greater courage, upon the necessity of not delaying any longer to calm public feeling in Russia, profoundly disturbed by its defeat, by taking up sincerely and resolutely the question of constitutional reform. With untiring perseverance he sustained this argument against the Czar himself as well as against the majority of his advisers, both civil and military, and from that moment until the treaty was finally signed Count Witte displayed a firmness and sureness of vision that place him in the rank of the greatest Ministers.

In the course of the *pourparlers* at Portsmouth he showed not only extraordinary talent as a negotiator, but also an elevation of character and a self-forgetfulness which did not distinguish him at other stages of his career. Toward the end of the discussions there was a supreme moment when, although he realized that he would have to face his compatriots on his return, bearing alone all the responsibility and perhaps all the odium of a treaty resulting from an unfortunate war and necessarily onerous to Russia, he had the moral courage to override orders from St. Petersburg that were often contradictory and sometimes bore the marks of insincerity—accepting on his own authority a compromise more favourable than Russia had any right to expect, but even

so of a nature that well might subject him to bitter reproaches later.

The conditions of the Peace of Portsmouth, in view of the circumstances, bore very lightly on Russia; the Japanese renounced all demands of a nature that would affect the vital interests or the dignity of the Russian Empire; Russia paid no war indemnity, retained her fleet and lost not an inch of her national territory. It is true that she ceded to Japan the southern part of the island of Saghalien, but that island had only been acquired at a comparatively recent date, and hardly any use had been made of it, while the Japanese had always maintained certain pretensions to its ownership. The Treaty of Portsmouth, then, may be considered as favourable to Russia in itself, but that which gave it especial value was its opening of the way for a resumption of normal relations with Japan, and more than that—a veritable *rapprochement* and even an alliance between the two countries. Count Witte deserves great credit for having foreseen this possibility even before he went to Portsmouth, and for having made indirect overtures, through Dr. Dillon, to the Japanese Ambassador at London. While nothing was accomplished in that direction at the time, Count Witte had not lost sight of his objective when it came time to define the conditions of the treaty, and it was that which gave me an opportunity later, when I was Minister of Foreign Affairs, to pick up the thread of his ideas and to bring about an understanding with Japan which, in its development, bore results so beneficial to Russia and to the entire Triple Entente.

It was a bitter disappointment to Count Witte, on his return to Russia, to see how unappreciative his countrymen were. The Emperor conferred upon him, it is true, the title of Count, a recompense which was accorded

by established custom to the negotiator of a treaty of peace, but the reception he gave him was rather cold than otherwise. Public opinion and that of the Press was distinctly hostile ; some humorous person dubbed him the " Count of Half-Saghalien " ; in short, the triumph which he expected and to which he had an indisputable right was not forthcoming, and he received little else but attacks and ridicule.

I believe that I entered into sufficient detail, in the first chapter of this book, with reference to Count Witte's activity at the head of the first constitutional Cabinet. What were the causes that checked his activity and to what extent could he have given a more favourable turn to events ? This is a problem that future historians of this troubled period will have to solve, and regarding which I hesitate to pronounce an opinion ; but does it not seem that in such critical circumstances Count Witte failed to exhibit all the firmness and consistency of character that were requisite for the occasion ? How are we to explain his choice of M. Dournovo for Minister of the Interior, and the latitude he gave that Minister for the exercise of a blind and brutal repression, which forced into conflict with the Government the most moderate elements of the country and contributed to the victory of the most radical parties ? And, above all, how can we justify his electoral law, whose effect was to give to the peasants the predominance in the first Douma and so cause its eventual shipwreck ?

It is difficult to attribute such errors to a lack of foresight on the part of a statesman of Count Witte's calibre, and one is forced to admit that he allowed himself to be guided by considerations affecting his personal interests rather than the permanent success of the work of reform which he had undertaken.

Count Witte, as a financier, was inclined to seek in purely material sources the dominating motive of all politics, whether foreign or domestic, and to neglect the *imponderabilia*, to which even so positive a mind as Prince Bismarck's assigned a rôle of the highest importance in the life of nations. The result was that Count Witte often committed grave errors in his diagnosis of the international situation. A striking instance was his absolute failure to comprehend the nature of the relations between France and Germany and the psychology of the French people; obsessed by the Utopian idea of a continental coalition, he was convinced that no real obstacle stood in the way of a participation by those two nations in such a coalition. I have already mentioned that when Count Witte was Minister of Finance he had under his orders a veritable diplomatic service, composed of so-called financial agents, attached to the Russian embassies and legations of the two hemispheres. These agents, most of whom were extremely active and intelligent, performed their duties in complete independence of their nominal diplomatic chiefs, corresponded in cipher with the Finance Minister without even exhibiting their reports to their superiors, and did not scruple to adopt and maintain political ideas that were opposed to those of the official Russian diplomacy. It was on these agents that Count Witte relied to obtain support for his project of an alliance between Russia, France and Germany, based upon a community of material interests and aimed against the preponderance of England in the domain of finance and commerce.

In the last years of the period preceding the world-war, when I was Ambassador at Paris, I had occasion to discuss this question several times with Count Witte, who used to stop at Paris on his way to Biarritz to join



his family. In the course of these discussions he expressed the conviction that France had lost all remembrance of its ancient warlike virtues ; that the immense majority of Frenchmen cared not a whit for the lost provinces, which were only of interest to a handful of Chauvinists, possessing little or no influence in the country ; and finally that the French nation, imbued with the ideas of international socialism and the pacifist propaganda, would always shrink from an armed conflict with Germany, especially if it grew out of oriental affairs. Ascribing an exaggerated influence to certain financial groups in Europe, he persuaded himself that with their aid great business affairs of common interest to France and Germany could be built up, and so prepare the way for a political *rapprochement*. He had no doubt that, if he were Ambassador at Paris, he could bring about that result.

Having been an attentive observer of French national life, I was far from sharing his opinions. Soon after my arrival in Paris, at the end of the year 1910, I witnessed, on the occasion of the Agadir crisis, the awakening of the patriotic spirit in France, in resistance to the brutality of Germany's foreign policy. I was convinced that the French nation, in spite of superficial appearances, had lost nothing of its attachment to the great principles of justice, liberty and progress which had made France the beacon-light of the world. In my dispatches, while noting the pacific tendencies of the French Government, I repeatedly affirmed that an unjustifiable provocation on the part of Germany would disclose France as ready to take up arms at the side of Russia and England, not only for the defence of her territory and the return of her patrimony, but also to assure the triumph of her ideas of right and independence in the world. More-



over, I knew too well the overbearing spirit that governed Germany's foreign policy, the constantly-increasing power of the Pan-Germanists and the determination of the Kaiser to impose the German hegemony on the world, to have any faith in the possibility of an alliance in which Germany would consent to enter on an equal footing with Russia and France. Accordingly, I founded my objections to Count Witte's arguments upon my firm conviction that in pursuing the chimera of his proposed alliance we should be running the risk of weakening our position with France and England and so destroying our only protection against the monstrous growth of Germany's military power. I maintained that it was imperative to hold ourselves ready against the day when Emperor William, impelled by the war party, would let loose the aggression that had been prepared so long in advance ; in short, that the only way to avert that danger was to fortify by every possible means the political, military and economic power of the Triple Entente. As for France, I was convinced that we could count upon her loyalty and that at the supreme hour the French people would rise as one man against the aggressor, regaining in a moment their patriotic *élan* and their traditional valour. I may add that I was called upon to defend this belief, not only against Count Witte, but against a group of Russian diplomats who looked with favour upon a *rapprochement* with Germany, among whom figured his colleague at Portsmouth, Baron Rosen ; the Russian Minister at Lisbon, M. Botkine, who was in high favour at Court, and others. My last conversation with Count Witte took place some months before the outbreak of the great war ; I never saw him again, and I know not if he recognized, before his death, how he had been mistaken about France, and how the moral factor often is of much

greater importance in the life of peoples than elements of a purely material nature.

When Count Witte yielded his place at the head of the Russian Government to M. Goremykine, there was no little curiosity as to the attitude that he would assume toward the new Cabinet. Nicholas II., as well as his new Ministers, was not without some anxiety on this point, and with good reason, because, in his capacity as a member of the Council of the Empire, or Upper House, Count Witte, author of the Manifesto of the 30th October, could easily become the leader of the Liberal Party in that body, and gather about him the enemies of the bureaucratic Cabinet of M. Goremykine. This was what everybody expected, and it was with great surprise that he was seen to renounce that rôle and to join in a rather conspicuous manner the reactionary group in the Council of the Empire, at the head of which he found his former colleague and adversary, M. Dournovo. He maintained this attitude throughout all the vicissitudes that followed the opening of the Douma, and, in the last years of his life, it became so exaggerated that there was good reason to believe that his intellectual faculties had been affected by an old malady. It has even been said that he humbled himself to the point of seeking the aid of Raspoutine in the hope of regaining the favour of the Czar and being recalled to power. I can hardly believe in such an aberration, but I recall a remark which he made in the course of a conversation during one of his visits to Paris at the time of the Balkan War, to the effect that, if Russia was not drawn into the war, it was not due to any effort of M. Sazonoff, whose policies he violently attacked, but thanks to the influence exerted upon the Emperor by Raspoutine in the direction of peace, and I remember how astonished I was at

the time to hear so extraordinary a statement from him.

Personally, in spite of my repugnance to admit such a conclusion, I do not hesitate to attribute his changed attitude to motives of selfish ambition. Accustomed for fifteen years to the exercise of a power, the extent of which I have described above, Count Witte was unable to become resigned to the loss of his official position, and all the strength of his great will was concentrated upon one object—the regaining of his former prestige. Knowing the tendencies of the Emperor and those who enjoyed his favour, he considered that the surest way to attain his end was to put himself at the service of the reactionaries, and so, abjuring his faith and abandoning a rôle in which he could still have rendered brilliant service to his country, he became the follower of such men as Dournovo, Stürmer and other reactionary leaders, losing thereby the respect of the Liberals without even gaining the Emperor's favour or the confidence of the reactionary party. It was a lamentable spectacle to see his fine intelligence and his superior gifts as a statesman consumed in the thirst for power and in the vain hope of regaining his former rank in the official world; especially so because it was evidently not due alone to his desire for political power, but rather to enjoy anew the external attributes of power. Owing to his not having attained high rank in the bureaucratic world until rather late in life, and so not having succeeded except at the cost of great effort in making a place for himself and his wife at Court and in the high society of the capital, this man of genius, but of awkward manners and aspect, attached an exaggerated importance to the social advantages which he had acquired with so much difficulty, and was conspicuous for the puerility of his social ambitions and for the eagerness with which he

pushed himself into the first rank of the oligarchic caste which surrounded the Emperor. To attain this end he did not hesitate to make use of his position as Grand Treasurer of the Empire, and it was no secret that, in order to force the doors of certain ultra-exclusive *salons* of St. Petersburg, he employed a golden key, in the form of loans and State subsidies to personages of social prominence who happened to be afflicted with pecuniary troubles.

Count Witte's enemies have charged him with being venal, and have cited facts and figures in support of their accusations, but I have never believed them to be true ; he always seemed to me to place much greater importance on the honours of official position than on money. He left power without any evidence of having acquired a great fortune, and, in order not to lose his chances of returning to office, he declined offers that were made by one of the greatest financial establishments of Russia, and would have assured him a most brilliant position from a pecuniary point of view, but would have been incompatible with his remaining a member, on the Emperor's appointment, of the Council of the Empire, by virtue of which he had access to the Court and belonged to the official world.

The facts related in the foregoing pages explain my assertion that the character of Count Witte was not always equal to his intellectual gifts ; but, at the same time, he possessed certain traits that were extremely sympathetic and attractive. He was a faithful and devoted friend, and inspired the warmest friendships in return. His devotion to the memory of the Emperor Alexander III. was almost passionate in its fervour, and he preserved for the Sovereign who had distinguished him and elevated him to power a pious gratitude. He

also knew how to hate, and could be a redoubtable enemy and adversary.

A very lovable trait was his affection for his family ; it was touching to see this giant, who was accustomed to bend the most unruly to his will, transformed into the slave of his little grandson and giving him the tenderest care. And when he sought with such insistence the outward show of power, was it so much for his own personal gratification as, perhaps, to secure a more brilliant career for a wife and a daughter whom he passionately loved ?

My personal relations with Count Witte were never on an intimate footing, as I have already said, and for a considerable time his attitude toward me was a hostile one, possibly because he feared that I might acquire an influence over affairs contrary to his. Dr. Dillon mentions in his book the opposition made by Count Witte to my appointment to the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs after the death of Count Mouravieff ; distrusting my spirit of independence, he persuaded the Emperor to name Count Lamsdorff, whom he was certain of managing and so was confident of becoming the absolute master of the Government's foreign policies. Dr. Dillon adds that Count Witte made a mistake, and, precisely because of my independence, that I would have seconded him much more effectively than did Count Lamsdorff, for I would not have tolerated the formation behind my back of an occult power composed of adventurers, and would either have resigned or obliged the Emperor to dismiss M. Bezobrazoff and his friends. Inasmuch as Dr. Dillon was told this by Count Witte himself, and because it tallies with what I have heard from another source, I have every reason to believe it. That which is certain is that he failed to appreciate the



homely truth that one cannot lean upon something which gives no resistance, and so voluntarily deprived himself of a collaborator quite as strongly opposed as he himself was to the Korean adventure, and who would not have hesitated to fight it in the most vigorous manner, instead of following Count Lamsdorff's stupid doctrine of passive obedience to the will of the Sovereign.

I am not sure if I have succeeded in tracing, as I planned, *sine ira et studio*, the portrait of Count Witte. His character was most complex, made up as it was of qualities which reached a veritable grandeur, mingled with others of surprising weakness; but, take him all in all, it would be difficult to define him in better words than those which Shakespeare put into the mouth of Antony when eulogizing Brutus:

" . . . the elements  
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world, This was a man."

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

Turning now from Count Witte to Count Lamsdorff, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1900 to 1906, one cannot help being impressed by the absolute contrast between the two men, which, however, never interfered with their close personal friendship and their intimate political relations. In contradistinction to the rough, unpolished man of genius, Count Lamsdorff was a type of the most finished courtier; brought up, one might say, on the steps of the throne, he had inherited, from several generations of high functionaries at the Imperial Court, the manners and ideas of another age, quite out of date even in the artificial environment of Nicholas II. He was a little man, extremely young-looking for his age, with light reddish hair and diminutive



tive moustache, always dressed, prinked and perfumed with the utmost care, and whose affected manner and falsetto voice gave no little chance for pleasantry. By the coquetry of his dress, the affectation of his speech, his habits of retirement and his little quasi-feminine vanities, he recalled the portrait which the chroniclers of the eighteenth century have handed down to us of the Prince of Kaunitz, when that famous Austrian diplomat was Ambassador at Paris. Possessing only the instruction acquired at the Corps de Pages, he lacked the advantages of a complete education, but he was gifted with an *ensemble* of qualities which made him from the start a functionary of the first order. Prodigiouslly industrious, discreet, never letting his work be interfered with by the usual distractions habitual to young people, he succeeded in making himself indispensable, as a confidant and intimate collaborator, to four Ministers of Foreign Affairs in succession : Prince Gortchakoff, M. de Giers, Prince Lobanoff and Count Mouravieff. During the tenure of Count Mouravieff he became the veritable mainspring of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, by his industry and knowledge of its details, made up for the indolence, ignorance and flippancy of that astonishing Minister, but up to that point his work was done entirely in the shade ; he avoided systematically all direct contact with the foreign Ambassadors, who sometimes almost doubted the existence of this Grey Eminence, whom they never saw but of whose hidden influence they were conscious. As we have seen, it was due to the intervention of Count Witte, who counted upon having in Count Lamsdorff an instrument entirely obedient to his will, that, after the death of Count Mouravieff, his industrious and influential subordinate became the real head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From that moment Count Lamsdorff, whose vaguely-defined character yielded to the vigorous personality of Count Witte, let himself be dominated in all matters by his great friend, and thereupon the two Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs were merged, so to speak, in one and the same person, Count Witte furnishing the motive and directive force and Count Lamsdorff placing at the service of the combination his great experience and perfect knowledge of diplomatic technique. No one was better versed than he in all the subtleties of diplomacy; the least important *billet* which he addressed to a foreign Ambassador, always on gilt-edged paper and delicately perfumed, was a model of style and elegance; he had at his fingers' ends all the minutiae of the protocol, and took as much pains in arranging an exchange of decorations as in drawing up the project of the most important international convention. In all the chancelleries of Europe it was well known that any error with regard to the exact ribbon he was to receive after an exchange of signatures would forfeit the good-will of the Russian Minister for all time, but it was equally well known that no negligence in the framing of a diplomatic instrument could possibly escape his practised eye. His memory was prodigious and he was never at a loss for a precedent or an argument drawn from the archives of his department.

Had Count Lamsdorff a definite plan of a general foreign policy, and did his mind grasp the international situation of Russia in its entirety? I confess that I have always doubted it. By family tradition, being of German origin, and by his turn of mind, he was rather inclined towards Germany, and, as a thorough partisan of the autocratic regime, he felt ill at ease with democratic France and constitutional England; but, on the other hand, he had been in intimate collaboration with his pre-

decessors in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who negotiated, at first the *rapprochement*, and afterwards the alliance with France. Having become Minister in his turn, he continued to maintain and conduct with scrupulous exactitude and, as we have seen in the Bjorkoe affair, with intelligence and ability, the system of the double alliance, to which the Emperor gave his unreserved adhesion ; but, in view of the strange idea he had of the functions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Russia, there is every reason to believe that he would have devoted equal care and conscience to any other system from the moment that it might be adopted by the Emperor, to whose will he considered himself bound to render a blind and passive obedience.

Count Lamsdorff's conduct of his department had an unfavourable effect upon the composition and efficiency of the central services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as of its services abroad. He was almost inaccessible to the majority of his subordinates, and shut himself up with a circle of personal friends, who were bound to each other by elective affinities of an extremely intimate nature, and among whom he distributed the most desirable positions at his command. This sort of "round table," to employ an expression often used at the Court of Berlin, dispensed favours, promotions and appointments to such an extent that when one had no protector there, as was my case, one must needs give up hope of agreeable places and be content with remote posts and those which were little sought after. As it happened, the scant favour which I enjoyed in that *cénacle* turned out to be very useful, for it is to that circumstance that I owe my experience at different posts in the Balkans and the Far East, which were not prized by diplomats, but where it was easier to acquire a

practical knowledge of affairs than in the most brilliant Embassies and Legations of Europe. When I succeeded Count Lamsdorff as Minister of Foreign Affairs I had a great deal of trouble in replacing the personnel of my department in more normal conditions, and some of the measures of purification that I was obliged to take gave rise to animosities and enmities which made themselves felt in the field of politics later.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PROVINCIAL NOBILITY

WHEN speaking of the causes that contributed to my *rapprochement* with M. Stolypine on entering the Cabinet of M. Goremykine, I mentioned that M. Stolypine and I were both strangers to the bureaucratic circle of St. Petersburg and that I was much more in sympathy with the members of the provincial nobility and the Zemstvos, who had sent to the Douma and the Council of the Empire some of their ablest representatives.

As this circumstance had an important bearing upon my conduct in office, I believe it will not be superfluous to insert at this point a few autobiographical details of a nature that will not only help to explain the political rôle that I played in my country, but will throw light upon certain aspects of the interior situation in Russia, at that period, which are scarcely known abroad. I will begin with a short description of the social structure of the country and the different classes that are called upon to take part in Russian political life.

Russia has never possessed an aristocracy in the sense of an exclusive caste like that of Western Europe, proceeding from feudalism, and whose members enjoy a privileged position in the State by reason of the nobility of their origin. At the end of the fifteenth

century, when the Grand Princes of Moscow succeeded in freeing themselves from the yoke of the Mongols and in assembling under their sceptre the majority of the other principalities which constituted Russia, they did not have to struggle against powerful feudal lords, and they aggrandized themselves only at the expense of their own family, whose different branches already ruled those principalities. As for the very numerous territorial nobility, or Dvorianstvo, it was composed of the most heterogeneous elements—descendants of the ancient companions-in-arms of the first Varangian Princes, of Norman origin, who were the founders of the monarchy in Russia during the ninth century; minor military chiefs, a sort of *condottieri*, who had come from the neighbouring States of Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, even Germany and Italy, at the head of small armed detachments; and Tartar chiefs, who had been vanquished by the Russian arms and had come over with their hordes to the service of Muscovy. Among all these elements the aborigines, properly so named, had but a feeble representation. They were a very democratic collection of merchants, artisans and especially farmers. The nobles, or Dvoriane, received from the Prince territorial domains, or *pomestia*, and were bound to furnish him in return, in case of war, armed contingents in proportion to the extent of the domains granted to them. At first the Dvoriane had only a very limited power over the peasants who peopled their lands. The peasants had a right to leave the domain of their lord, at certain fixed periods of the year, and establish themselves on the land of another who offered them better terms, and it was not until some time later, under the Czar Boris Godounoff (1593–1605), that this right was taken away and the peasants



were attached to the soil, thus becoming real serfs of their respective lords. It is well known that serfdom was abolished by the Emperor Alexander II. in 1861, so it lasted for only about 250 years in Russia; and this is only true of Russia proper, for in Little Russia, or the Ukraine, it was not introduced until the close of the eighteenth century by the Empress Catherine II., and consequently lasted a little over a half-century.

The Dvorianstvo, whose cosmopolitan origin I have just referred to, blended very quickly with the native population of Russia. There were several reasons for this rapid assimilation, the chief of which were the total absence of caste prejudice among the Dvoriane, who mixed readily with the common people of their respective localities, and, in a general way, the great absorbing force which the Russian nation has always possessed. It may, therefore, be said that the Dvorianstvo never had the character of a real aristocracy, but rather constituted a class of servers of the State. There was no title of nobility in ancient Russia except that of Prince, preserved by courtesy for those belonging to the branches of the reigning house, mediatized by the Grand Princes of Moscow, like the Bariatinskys, the Galitzines, Dolgoroukys, Gortchakoffs, and others; but the title conferred no special privilege upon those who bore it, and a great many of those descendants of Rurik (still called at the present day by the generic name of Rurikovitchi) soon became confounded with the ordinary Dvoriane. A certain number of families belonging to the Dvorianstvo were, it is true, distinguished above others and formed about the throne a sort of oligarchy, whose members bore the title of Boyards; but, although in those families the son generally succeeded to his father's title, or rather dignity,

of Boyard, it was never strictly hereditary, and the ranks of the Boyards were always open to those of the Dvoriane who were successful in pushing themselves forward in the service of the State. The Grand Princes, and afterwards the Czars of Moscow, who chose their wives from among the daughters of their subjects, made no distinction in this regard between the princely families and those of the Boyards, or even the simple Dvoriane, and when an heir to the Muscovite throne was of age to marry, some hundreds of young maidens belonging to the various grades of the Dvorianstvo were summoned to Moscow and the future Czarina was selected, the preference being given to her who possessed the greatest personal attractions, beauty, health and so forth, but without regard for the superior or minor importance of her house. The family, sometimes of modest origin, which gave in this way a reigning Princess to the country, gained naturally a position of great power at Moscow, as was the case with the Godounoffs, the Naryschkines, the Lopouchines, etc. The Romanoffs themselves, one of whom founded a new dynasty, were only allied to the ancient reigning house on the female side.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, that is, on the eve of the reforms of Peter the Great, the Dvorianstvo formed a class manifesting a high sense of the part they had to play in the service of the State, and distinguishing themselves by a remarkable aptitude in assimilating the customs of occidental civilization, to which the doors of Russia were about to be opened. It was from this class that Peter the Great recruited the greater part of the young men whom he sent abroad to acquire the knowledge necessary for the transformation of the country, and who furnished an important contin-

gent to the new governmental personnel created by the great reformer. Abolishing the old social distinctions (he named no more Boyards, the last of whom, Prince Ivan Troubetskoy, died in 1750), Peter the Great established a new scale of rank, based entirely upon the personal services rendered to the State in all departments of the civil and military hierarchy. This new order absorbed a good many representatives of the Dvorianstvo, but without affecting, as a whole, their attachment to the soil, nor their consciousness of belonging to a distinct class, having its roots in the Russia of the past.

Under the successors of Peter the Great there developed at St. Petersburg a strongly centralized and essentially bureaucratic government, whose personnel became more and more diverse in its origin, comprising foreigners as well as native Russians. Eventually the throne was surrounded by a caste of courtiers and functionaries who still bore no resemblance to the nobility of the French Court nor to the English aristocracy, but who monopolized all the offices and positions of importance and who constituted the high society of St. Petersburg. It was at this point that titles of nobility, borrowed from Occidental Europe, began to be conferred. Barons, Counts and even Princes were created, but it is curious to note that all these new titles were of an exotic character for a long while, and when a Russian sovereign wished to ennoble one of his subjects he did not do it himself, but obtained the respective patent from the Holy Roman Empire. So the only real Russian title continued to be that of Prince, and belonged only to a descendant of the house of Rurik.

It is easy to understand then that the high society of St. Petersburg was of the most heterogeneous origin.

It comprised not only the authentic descendants of Rurik, but those of a pastryman's apprentice, like the Princes Menschikoff, of a Little Russian peasant, like the Princes Razoumovsky, or of a soldier of fortune, like the Princes Orloff. One of the most frequent sources of titles, fortune and influence was the favour of the Empress, Elizabeth or Catherine, accorded to a young officer of the guards, and sometimes even to a servant of more humble rank. The great poet of the Russian nation, Pouschkine, himself a descendant of one of the families belonging to the ancient Dvorianstvo and having furnished Boyards to the Court of the Czars of Moscow, referred to this same society in the following lines :

"With us the nobility is young,  
And the younger it is, the nobler."

During the reigns of the Emperors Paul I. and Alexander I. the division between the provincial Dvorianstvo and the society of the Court became more marked. While the latter lived at St. Petersburg or followed the sovereign to his summer residence, the provincial nobility lived on their estates during the summer and passed the winter months by preference in the ancient capital of the Czars, Moscow. It was in this *milieu*, at the time of the Napoleonic wars, that the liberal ideas imbibed by the young Russian officers during the stay of the Allies at Paris, found the most encouragement, and it was also the class that furnished the greater part of the actors in the conspiracy of December, 1825, against Emperor Alexander I., the object being to obtain from his successor a constitutional charter for Russia. History tells of the severity with which Emperor Nicholas I. suppressed that movement and of the fate of the Decembrists, some of whom, like Princes Wolkonsky

and Troubetzkoy, belonged to the greatest families of Russia, and almost all of whom were recruited from the nobility of the provinces.

The rule of iron exercised by Nicholas I. during his thirty years' reign did not succeed in stifling the progressive spirit of this class, and, when Emperor Alexander II. inaugurated in 1856 a new era of liberal reforms, it was again the provincial nobility which gave the most enthusiastic support to his reforms.

The principal act of the fine reign of Alexander II. was, of course, the emancipation of the serfs. This reform, before being put into effect by the Ministers of that Sovereign, had been the subject of an active propaganda made by a brilliant group of thinkers and writers, almost all of whom belonged to the provincial nobility, and whose most typical representative was Ivan Tourgueneff.\* This class, which comprised the only owners of domains peopled by serfs, sacrificed their material interests to the great principle of emancipation, which had as its corollary the dividing among the serfs of a large part of the lands belonging to the nobles, and, although the proprietors were to have been indemnified, the economic revolution which ensued was a serious blow to their welfare.

The other reforms of Emperor Alexander II., such as the reorganization of justice and the creation of the local self-governing bodies, or Zemstvos, were also most cordially welcomed by the provincial nobility. It became the fashion for the young nobles to shun the bureaucratic institutions of St. Petersburg and to serve in the provinces as marshals of the nobility, members of the Zemstvos, judges and arbiters of the peace.

\* Tourgueneff's lands in the province of Toula were adjacent to those of my family.



(The latter acted as intermediaries between the proprietors and the peasants for the purchase of land.) I have already mentioned that the intention of Alexander II. was to have the Zemstvos form the embryo of a veritable national representation; the future Russian parliament was to be composed of delegates from those assemblies, which became in consequence the school of Russian parliamentarism.

After the assassination of Emperor Alexander II., when the era of liberal reforms came to an end and his successor inaugurated a reactionary régime, with a bureaucratic centralization *à outrance*, the Zemstvos became more and more of a refuge for the liberal elements of the country; some of these, as, for example, the Zemstvo of the province of Tver, grew to be very conspicuous in that direction and were persecuted by the Government on that account. Finally Moscow, the ancient capital of the Czars, celebrated for its patriotism and its ultra-national spirit, and always regarded in official circles as the citadel of loyalty to autocracy, became in reality the stronghold of the propaganda in favour of constitutional reform.

At the beginning of the reign of Nicholas II. the provincial nobility were still prominent in the Zemstvos, and placed themselves at the head of the moderate liberal movement in the hope of persuading the young Emperor to return to the ideas of his grandfather. In response to an address presented by the Zemstvo of Tver, petitioning in the most loyal terms the privilege of national representation, Emperor Nicholas, acting on the advice of M. Pobiedonostzeff, treated their aspirations as "insensate dreams." This reply marks the origin of the profound dissension between the Emperor and his people, which grew stronger from day



to day throughout his reign, to the extent that, when finally, after ten years, he was obliged to yield to the revolution and convoke the Douma, the representatives sent to that body and to the Council of the Empire by the provincial nobility and the Zemstvos adopted an attitude unmistakably hostile to the bureaucratic Government of the Emperor.

This rapid sketch of the part played in Russia by the class to which I belonged by birth and family tradition will help the reader to understand the peculiar position which I occupied when I entered the thoroughly bureaucratic Cabinet of M. Goremykine.

My family has, in fact, belonged to the Russian Dvorianstvo since the middle of the fifteenth century; its founder, a native of Poland, came to Russia in 1462, according to authentic documents, with his armed troop, to offer his services to the Grand Prince of Moscow, John III., and was granted by him certain lands, of which I still retain a part (that is, if the revolution has not relieved me of them for good and all). Since that epoch and throughout the entire Muscovite period my ancestors acquitted themselves faithfully of all the obligations incumbent upon them therefor. Two of them figured in the siege of Kazan in 1552 at the head of their contingent, and others occupied prominent positions in Moscow, but they never rose to any exalted rank in the Muscovite oligarchy, although, by reason of the extent of their domains, they were distinguished members of the provincial Dvorianstvo. They retained this position during the Petersburg period, but were never numbered among the courtiers and high functionaries who thronged the palaces and government offices of St. Petersburg, and continued to reside upon their lands and to gravitate towards Moscow, which

was always considered by the Dvoriane to be the real capital.

My father, who was born in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, was a typical representative of his class. Open-minded and erudite, he had frequented as a young man the *salon* of Madame Elaguine, which was the centre of the cultivated society of Moscow. He met there, besides the coterie of Pouschkine, such adepts of occidental culture as Tchaadaieff and the historian Granovsky, as well as the first apostles of Slavophilism, among whom were Samarine, Khomiakoff and the brothers Kireievsky. He had begun by serving in the army, like all well-born young Russians of that period, but soon abandoning the military career, he was for several years the trusted assistant of a near relative of my mother's, Count Mouravieff-Amoursky, Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, who had gained great renown as conqueror and organizer of the vast region of the Amour.

Count Mouravieff-Amoursky was noted for his liberal ideas, and had gathered about him in Irkoutsk, the capital of Eastern Siberia, a group of distinguished young men imbued with the same ideas. This group became intimate with the families of the Decembrists, who had been exiled to Siberia thirty years before, for having taken part in the conspiracy of 1825, and who, after passing many years in the more remote regions of Siberia, had finally obtained permission to establish themselves at Irkoutsk. In a recent article published in the *Revue de Paris*, entitled "*Une Elite en Exil*," my daughter described, from memoirs of that epoch, the life led by the Decembrists, some of whom, such as the Princes Wolkonsky and Troubetzkoy, belonged to the most illustrious families of Russia and all of

whom were progressive and cultivated people. The result was that the capital of that distant province became noted for having a society distinguished by a high intellectual culture and by the most liberal ideas. Count Mouravieff-Amoursky and his wife, a Frenchwoman by birth (she was a *Mademoiselle de Richemont*), opened wide to the exiles the doors of their home, and my parents did the same—for my mother, in spite of the great hazards of the journey, had accompanied my father to Siberia. They were often denounced at St. Petersburg for what was considered to be an undue benevolence towards the Decembrists. Not long after, on the accession of the Emperor Alexander II., a full pardon, which had been obstinately refused for more than thirty years by Nicholas I., was granted to the exiles, and they were allowed to return to Russia, where some of them took up anew the brilliant social life that they had led before their banishment. My parents maintained the closest intimacy all their lives with several Decembrist families, who remained faithful always to their liberal traditions, and one of whose descendants, Prince Wolkonsky, I found among the members of the Douma. He became one of its vice-presidents eventually.

After having been Count Mouravieff-Amoursky's lieutenant in Siberia, my father was for some years Governor of two provinces of Central Russia in succession. During that time he applied himself with great zeal to putting in practice the liberal reforms of the Emperor Alexander II., but he resigned before long and retired to his estates, where he led the life of a country gentleman until his death, retaining always a keen interest in all the manifestations of European culture and the progress of liberal ideas.

My mother's family was much more closely connected with the Court of St. Petersburg than my father's, but those relations were broken after one of the palace tragedies that have marked almost every succession to the throne of Russia from the reign of Peter the Great to the beginning of the nineteenth century, so that it could well be said of Russian autocracy that it was "a despotic régime tempered by regicide."

In fact, my mother's grandfather, Prince Yaschvill, who occupied a very important military position under the reign of Paul I., was one of the principal actors in the drama which had its epilogue in the violent death of that Emperor, and the situation of his descendants was materially affected thereby.

We all know of the inconsistencies and outrages which marked the four years' reign of the madman who succeeded the great Catherine on the throne of Russia at the close of the year 1796. When the year 1801 opened, the insanity of Paul I. assumed such proportions that the leading personages of the Imperial Court found themselves obliged to consider what measures could be taken to put an end to a situation which threatened the very safety of the Empire. Was the heir to the throne, afterwards the Emperor Alexander I., cognizant of the conspiracy that was forming for that purpose, and which was headed by Count Pahlen, military governor of the capital? The historians who have recorded this event, including the most recent and most conscientious of all, the Grand Duke Nicholas Michailovitch, agree that the conspirators had received the assent of Alexander for a plan for bringing about the abdication of the Emperor, but it appears certain that the assassination of his father was a cruel surprise to him,

and caused a shock to his sensitive nature from which he never recovered, and which had much to do with the mystic and even morbid turn of mind that afflicted him in after life.

Prince Yaschvill took a direct part in the tragic event which occurred on the night of March 23rd, 1801. The new palace, just built by the Emperor Paul, in which the Imperial Court had been installed without even waiting for the walls to dry, was guarded that night by a regiment particularly devoted to the Grand Duke Alexander. The group of conspirators who penetrated the palace included my ancestor and some ten other personages, all occupying high positions in the Empire, such as Count Pahlen, Prince Zouboff, the last favourite of the Empress Catherine, his brother Count Zouboff, Prince Wolkonsky, Count Benigsen and General Ouvaroff. Their avowed purpose was to arrest the Emperor Paul and force him to abdicate in favour of his eldest son. What happened when these men reached the bedroom of the Emperor? The exact circumstances have never come to light. Paul I., hearing the sound of their approach, and trying to escape by a passage leading to the apartment of the Empress, is supposed to have found the door of the passage locked on the outside and to have taken refuge behind a window curtain. The story is that when the conspirators found that the Emperor was not in bed, they feared they were lost, and were about to beat a retreat, but Count Pahlen, having touched the sheets, cried: "The nest is warm, the bird cannot be far off." The Emperor's hiding-place having been discovered, he tried to defend himself, but succumbed after a short struggle, pierced by the conspirators' swords, according to some, and, if we may believe others, strangled



with Prince Yaschvill's sash, the emblem of his rank and service.\*

The contemporaneous records of this event represent Prince Yaschvill as a man of great nobility of character, but of fiery and vindictive nature. Certain chroniclers of that epoch ascribe his participation in the conspiracy to a motive of personal revenge, asserting that he had been struck by the Emperor Paul with his cane on the parade ground, and had sworn to wash with blood the stain to his honour. I know not if this tale is true, but, whatever his personal feelings were toward Paul I., a document piously preserved in my mother's family proves beyond a doubt that his act was inspired by an earnest desire, shared also by the other conspirators, to save Russia at any cost from the danger to which its Sovereign's madness exposed the country.

The document I refer to is the rough draft of a letter addressed by Prince Yaschvill to the Emperor Alexander a short time after the event of March 23rd. In this letter, a complete translation of which was published for the first time by the Grand Duke Nicholas Michailovitch in his fine book, entitled "The Emperor Alexander I.," my ancestor gave his reasons for having joined the conspiracy and pointed out in the boldest words the duties that were incumbent upon the young Czar.

The text of the letter follows :

"SIRE,

"From the moment that your unhappy and

\* The death of Paul I. was made the subject of a drama by M. Merejkovsky, one of the most brilliant writers of the new Russian school, who made use of the memoirs of the period and oral traditions handed down to the descendants of some of the conspirators. In this drama, which has never been permitted to be played in Russia, M. Merejkovsky assigns to Prince Yaschvill a particularly active and even brutal rôle.



demented father mounted the throne, I resolved, if necessary, to sacrifice myself for the good of Russia, which has been the plaything of favourites since the reign of Peter the Great and finally became the prey of folly.

“Our fatherland is subjected to autocratic power—of all powers the most dangerous, for it causes the fate of millions of men to hang upon one man’s grandeur of mind and soul. Peter the Great bore the burden of autocracy with glory and wisdom, and under his ægis the country prospered.

“The God of Truth knows that if we have stained our hands with blood, it was not for any motive of self-interest; may it please God that the sacrifice we have made shall not prove sterile.

“Rise, Sire, to the height of your vocation; show yourself on the throne, if it be possible, a Russian citizen and an honest man; do not be unmindful that for despair there are always means of redress. I am now even greater than you, for I desire nothing more, and if it should be necessary to safeguard your glory, which would not be so precious in my estimation if it were not at the same time the glory of Russia, I would be ready to die on the scaffold; but it is useless—all the fault falls upon us, and the Imperial mantle has covered much greater crimes.

“Adieu, Sire. In the eyes of the Sovereign I am the saviour of our native land; in those of the son I am the murderer of his father. Adieu, and may the benediction of the Almighty be with Russia and with you, her terrestrial idol. May she never have cause to blush for you.”

None of those who took part in the conspiracy were

subjected to formal prosecution, although the former preceptor of Alexander I., Laharpe, who was then living in retirement in Switzerland, hurried to St. Petersburg and endeavoured to convince the Emperor of the necessity of bringing to judgment those at least who were designated as the actual murderers, and among them Prince Yaschvill. But in spite of the great influence which he retained over his pupil, his efforts were unsuccessful. Not only did the guilty ones remain unpunished, but some of them, notably General Ouvaroff, enjoyed eventually the special favour of the Emperor Alexander. Count Pahlen and the two Zouboffs left the capital and spent the rest of their lives on their lands. Count Benigsen, who was of German origin, continued his military career and won great fame during the Napoleonic wars, but he was never *persona grata* at Court, and could never obtain the bâton of marshal, although it was awarded to other Germans of inferior merit, such as Sacken and Wittgenstein.

Prince Yaschvill alone received an order banishing him to his estates. At the time of the French invasion he put himself at the head of the militia levied by the nobility of the province and gained signal successes over the enemy, but nevertheless he was never permitted to show himself at St. Petersburg, nor even at Moscow, and he lived until his death on one of his properties, where I passed a part of my childhood and youth, and where the memory of his imposing figure still endured.

According to the traditions existing in my mother's family, the true cause of Prince Yaschvill's banishment from Court was not the active part attributed to him in the drama of March 23rd, but rather the haughty letter which he addressed to the Emperor Alexander, and, above all, it was thought, that passage in which

he alluded to the "means" which would always be found to remedy the despair of a country menaced with ruin through the excesses of autocracy. That letter, which I knew by heart almost from my infancy, filled me with admiration for my ancestor, whom I pictured as an emulator of Brutus. It is more than probable that this contributed to inculcate at an early age the aversion which I have always felt for autocracy, and to turn my mind toward liberal and constitutional ideas.

Prince Yaschvill's banishment had the effect of keeping my mother's family in the provinces and almost cutting off its relations with the Court. After his death his descendants lived on their estates in summer and at Moscow in winter—an existence that has been described in so vivid a manner by Tolstoy in "War and Peace." I was in my seventh year when serfdom was abolished, and during my childhood the family life of a landed proprietor in comfortable circumstances varied little from what it had been under the old régime. It was not only broad and often luxurious, but, considering the enormous distances and the difficulty of communications, it was quite remarkable in its adoption of the forms of Western Europe. Most of the manorial residences dated from the epoch of the Empress Catherine II. and had been built in the neo-classic style introduced in Russia during her reign ; in the most remote regions of the Empire were found the columned façades, and the triangular frontons which even at the present day give so peculiar a *cachet*, not only to St. Petersburg, but still more to Moscow and the provincial cities of Russia. It is curious that this style, born under Attic skies, applied by Palladio to the villas of Venice's patricians and by Inigo Jones to the homes of England's aristocracy, should have been acclimated

in Russia to the point of becoming, so to speak, a national form of architecture, associated with the most brilliant epoch of the Russian monarchy at the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The château was generally surrounded by a park, laid out in the prevailing taste of that period, that is, in accordance with the ideas of J. J. Rousseau, with which he inspired the creator of Ermenonville. There were temples dedicated to friendship, rustic hermitages, artificial ruins, and monuments ornamented with inscriptions touching the human feelings. The library, in most cases, contained a complete collection of the French encyclopædists and the English philosophers. It often happened that all this sort of thing did not fit particularly well the landlords' behaviour, which in certain regards retained the stamp of ancient Russia; there were examples of an abuse of seigneurial power and of arbitrary methods, encouraged by the absence of an efficient control over the right of serfdom, but such excesses were rather rare and, in general, the manners of the land-holding nobility were gentle and polite. My parents were humane masters to their serfs, and the greater part of their servants, or, as they were called in distinction to the peasants attached to the soil, *les gens de la cour*, remained in their service even after they had been freed. As far back as I can remember, there was in my parents' house a permanent staff of cosmopolitan instructors: English maids, and French, English and German tutors and governesses. This was also a common custom in other houses of the same standing, and it explains why the majority of my compatriots belonging to this class and this period spoke the principal foreign languages with such perfection. The French language, particularly, was in current use, not only at the

Imperial Court, in the elegant society of St. Petersburg, and in Russian diplomacy (up to the reign of the Emperor Alexander III. all diplomatic correspondence was carried on in French), but also among the Russian provincial nobility. I do not remember ever having written to my parents except in French—a French teeming with Russianisms that were sometimes most amusing, but retaining certain forms which dated from before the great revolution and which gave it a peculiar originality.

After finishing the usual preparatory courses of youth I entered, at the same time with my elder brother, the Imperial Lyceum to complete my education. The Lyceum, which was a school of advanced political studies, was founded by the Emperor Alexander I. at the commencement of his reign, when, with the aid of a group of young and brilliant collaborators, Speransky, Czartoryski, Kotchouboy, etc., he undertook to remodel the institutions of the Empire on a liberal plan, the object of that particular foundation being to form a chosen body of young men to constitute the *personnel* of the new institutions. In order to gain admittance it was necessary to belong to the class of the nobility, or, in default of title, to be the son of one of the high functionaries of the Empire. The first group of young men educated within the walls of the Lyceum, to which the Emperor Alexander had assigned premises in his own palace at Tsarskoie-Selo, was particularly brilliant. Its distinguishing glory was that it gave to Russia her greatest poet, Pouschkine, and together with him one of her most eminent statesmen, Prince Gortchakoff, future Chancellor of the Empire. From that time and up to the present day the Lyceum has been the cradle of a long line of servants of the State, of poets, of writers



—almost all animated by ideas and aspirations derived from the traditions of that first group of pupils, which has received the name of the “*pléiade de Pouschkine*.”

My years of study at the Lyceum coincided with the events that led up to the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and with the reawakening in Russia of the Slavophilist theories. These theories had their birth at Moscow in the first half of the nineteenth century, their spiritual fathers being the poet-theologian Khomiakoff and the two brothers Kireievsky, who were soon joined by a number of thinkers, savants and publicists, such as the two Aksakoffs, Samarine, Lemansky and Hilferding. All had been nourished on the German philosophy of Schelling and Hegel, who reigned supreme at that time in the Russian universities, and it was from their philosophy and, in a general way, from German romanticism that the doctrine which came to be known, improperly enough, as Slavophilism was derived. It is very curious to note that this doctrine, in the last analysis, is of German origin and quite similar to that which gave rise to the notion of a German *Kultur*, superior to all other cultures and destined to dominate the world. I have no hesitation in saying that it did great harm in Russia, especially when, as we shall see, its adherents tried to translate it from a purely speculative plane to that of practical politics.

At the beginning of the reign of Alexander II. Slavophilism was relegated to comparative unimportance by the enthusiasm with which the Russian public welcomed his reforms, conceived as they were in a spirit of European liberalism, but, at the period of which I am now speaking, those reforms had been halted and even received a set-back, owing to the agrarian troubles that followed the emancipation of the serfs and by the



rapid growth of the revolutionary movement, which manifested itself in a series of attempts to assassinate the Emperor and some of the high dignitaries. The Slavophiles, who were always tinged with reactionary ideas, began to profit by this turn of affairs, but that which contributed more than anything else to bring their doctrines into new favour was the impression produced in Russia by the events that came to pass in the Balkan peninsula at that period, and which drew the attention and sympathy of all classes of Russian society to the unhappy lot of the Slav populations who were subjected to the oppression of the Turkish Empire. Up to that time Slavophilism had only been professed by the members of certain limited circles in Moscow, but the insurrection in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbo-Turkish war and the Bulgarian atrocities aroused a great enthusiasm for the "brother Slavs" all over Russia and pushed the Slavophiles to the fore.

The Slavophile theory had been expounded some twenty years before and, so to speak, crystallized into a doctrine by a writer of great talent, M. Danilevsky, whose book, "Russia and Europe," little noticed by the Russian public at the time of its appearance, was now in everybody's hands. This book proclaimed in inflammatory terms the profound antagonism between Russia and the occidental world, and the inferiority of European culture to that of Russia, based upon the principles dear to the hearts of the Slavophiles. In the field of foreign political relations, Danilevsky claimed that Russia should unite all the Slavs, if not under her sceptre, at least under her hegemony; that Constantinople should become the capital of the Russian Empire and at the same time the capital of the future Slavonic federation. These results, he maintained, could only be attained by an armed

conflict with the Orient and with the rest of Europe ; the victory should be gained by the Greco-Slavs, led by Russia, and should establish the definite triumph of its civilization over that of the Germano-Roman peoples.

Danilevsky's book did much to create in Russia a bellicose state of mind which eventually led to the declaration of war against Turkey. In this respect it may be compared to Houston Stewart Chamberlain's "The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century," which played a similar part later in Germany, when, having become the *vade mecum* of the Kaiser, it helped to stimulate the dominating appetite of the Germans and to urge them on to the assault against their peaceable neighbours. Is it not curious that, within a quarter of a century, two books, only noticed at first by a small number of readers, should have had afterwards such a tremendous effect upon the public at large and upon the course of history ? And is it not a proof that the destinies of nations are ruled by ideas and by abstract and psychological factors rather than by purely material considerations ?

Slavophilism, in spite of its national and religious creed, was at first regarded with mistrust by the Russian Government and suspected of demagogic tendencies. After being confined to Moscow and subjected to the annoyances of the police, the Slavophiles, thanks to the current of feeling started by the events in the Balkans, gained little by little a footing in St. Petersburg and even at the Court of Alexander II., where they found a powerful protectress in the person of Countess Bloudoff, Lady of Honour to the Empress, possessing great influence in the high society of the capital and enjoying special favour with the Imperial family. The *salon* of this *grande dame* was thrown open to the propaganda for the

intervention of Russia in freeing the Oriental Slavs from the Turkish yoke. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the direction of the Chancellor, Prince Gortchakoff, of keen and sound intelligence, despite his advanced age, attempted to oppose this propaganda for some time, but ended by following the current. Moreover, one of the most ardent advocates of Slavophilism was a high functionary in the Ministry, M. Tutscheff, a poet of great talent and a brilliant talker, who was listened to with the highest interest in Countess Bloudoff's *salon* and at the Court.

The two years which preceded the war of 1877 were marked by an ever-increasing effervescence of Russian sympathy for the cause of the Slavs in the Orient. This movement pervaded all classes of society, and manifested itself by a great warlike enthusiasm on the part of the young men of Russia and by the enlistment of many volunteers in the Serbian army. My elder brother entered a regiment of the guard, and when war was declared against Turkey he went to the front; I was burning to follow his example, but my youth prevented, so I kept on with my studies, and when, being scarcely nineteen years of age, I was finally free to follow my own wishes, the war had just been terminated by the peace of San Stephano (March 3rd, 1878). In order not to lose my chance of taking part in the events that were ensuing in the Balkans and in which I was passionately interested, I entered the diplomatic service and made my *début* some months later as an attaché at Constantinople. The Russian Government had renewed diplomatic relations with Turkey, sending as Ambassador Prince Lobanoff, later Minister of Foreign Affairs. Thanks to the protection and constant friendship of that eminent statesman I climbed quickly the first steps of the diplomatic

career, but that which I owe to him above all else is the mere contact with his high intellectual culture and the remarkable lucidity of his judgment, which broadened my ideas and saved me from many of the errors common to the younger generation of that period.

If it were not for a fear of tiring my readers I should like to give the space which it deserves to a portrait of Count Lobanoff; I will only say that he was one of the most brilliant representatives of the group of public men brought up under the liberal reign of Alexander II. By birth a *grand seigneur*, the Lobanoff-Rostovskys being descended from one of the elder branches of the house of Rurik—the Princes Rostoff—he was also distinguished as an historian and a man of great learning. He was a *diplomate de carrière*, but for family reasons he remained out of the service during a considerable period, until he resumed diplomatic activity as Ambassador to Constantinople. After occupying the Embassies of Vienna and London, he became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1895, but died the year following, while accompanying Emperor Nicholas on a journey abroad. It was only a short time before that he had again given evidence of his friendship for me by proposing my name to the Emperor for the post of his assistant, or Under-Secretary of State, but his death prevented my appointment. When I was called, in my turn, to direct the foreign relations of Russia, I did not always walk in his footsteps, nor did I follow certain of his political beliefs, but I preserve to this day a great veneration for his memory and am proud to have been numbered among his favourite pupils.

If I have risked, in the present chapter, the reproach of having given too much room to my antecedents and my earlier years, it is because it has seemed to me that I could best explain thereby certain aspects of the social

and political structure of Russia that are not generally appreciated by the outside world. A detailed recital of the vicissitudes that have marked my long diplomatic career would not, on the contrary, present any particular interest from that point of view, and so I am quite sure that my readers will be grateful to me for sparing them the fatigue. It will be sufficient to enumerate the successive *étapes*—Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania, the United States, Italy, Serbia, Bavaria, Japan, and finally Denmark, whence I proceeded to St. Petersburg to take charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Among these *étapes*, however, there was one—the mission that I fulfilled at the Vatican from 1886 to 1897, in the time of Pope Leo XIII.—that placed me at odds with the Russian bureaucracy from that day on and had a marked influence upon the position which I took afterwards on certain questions of domestic politics, notably those concerning religious liberty and the treatment of the foreign populations of Russia. For this reason I will devote some pages in a future chapter to that mission, which marked one of the most interesting periods of my diplomatic career, but, for the moment, I will avoid further digressions and proceed to the recital of the events which followed the opening of the first Douma.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GOREMYKINE CABINET

AS was to be expected, the Douma not only adopted from the start an attitude bitterly hostile to the Government, but showed plainly a determination to go beyond the prerogatives accorded by the charter of 1905. This was first manifested in the proposed reply to the address from the throne, prepared by a committee of thirty-three members, all belonging to the Opposition. This reply embodied almost point by point the electoral programme of the Cadet party, comprising the suppression of the Council of the Empire, ministerial responsibility to the Douma, universal suffrage, abrogation of all exceptional laws and all class privilege, absolute liberty of conscience, public meetings and the Press, abolition of capital punishment, etc. The agrarian question was treated in the most radical fashion, even to the distribution to the peasants of all the crown and convent domains and the forced expropriation of a part of the lands in private ownership. It further affirmed the principle of full and entire amnesty for all political crimes and misdemeanours. The discussion of the proposed reply lasted a week and terminated in a particularly exciting night session, in the course of which the best orators of the Cadet party, like Messrs. Petrounkevitch and Roditcheff, pronounced inflammatory discourses reproaching



the Government for the brutal repression of the revolutionary movement and demanding the immediate release of all who had been imprisoned during the recent disturbances. The address was unanimously approved by vote of the members present, the small group of Octobrists and Conservatives having left the hall without daring to vote against it.

The adoption of the address amounted undoubtedly to an attempt on the part of the Douma to arrogate to itself the rights of a constituent assembly, and to revise the charter of 1905 in an ultra-radical sense. It caused the greatest consternation in Government circles, and was followed by a dispute between the representatives of the nation and the monarchical power with regard to the manner in which it was to be presented to the Emperor. He refused to receive the delegation appointed for the purpose by the Douma, and sent word to the President that he would not accept the address except through the hands of the Minister of the Court. The deputies resented this affront all the more keenly because they had used the utmost pains to clothe their requests in language that was most correct and even imbued with loyalty toward the person of their Sovereign. Thanks to the good sense of some of the leaders of the Cadets, the point was not pressed ; the Douma declared that it was the tenor of the address that mattered and not the mode of presentation, and, recognizing that the Emperor's refusal, which applied equally to the Council of the Empire, implied no blame, they submitted to what they chose to consider as a mere conformity with the protocol of the Imperial Court.

But soon afterwards the antagonism between the Douma and the Government grew more acute, when M. Goremykine mounted the tribune for the first time to

read a declaration from the Ministry in response to the address, which amounted to an absolute *non possumus*.

The Ministerial declaration had been the subject of a prolonged discussion in the Council of Ministers; for my part I had not only protested strongly against the terms in which it was conceived, but had questioned the propriety of a reply by the Government to the Douma. Arguing from the practice of other parliamentary assemblies, I tried to convince my colleagues that the Cabinet, as such, was not called upon to intervene in a dialogue between the Sovereign and the representatives of the nation, and that the sole result of a like intervention would be to provoke a conflict at a moment when it would be particularly sterile and dangerous. I suggested, moreover, that it would be well to submit to the Douma at once as many projects of laws as possible, so as to furnish matter for debate and cut short all attempts to overstep its prerogatives.

My objections, which received the support of M. Stolypine alone, were set aside, and on the 26th of May M. Goremykine betook himself with great pomp and ceremony to the Douma to read his declaration, accompanied by all the members of the Cabinet.

This first brush between the Government and the assembly was deplorable from every point of view. Apart from the contents of the declaration, which roused the indignation of the majority present, the haughty attitude and disdainful tone assumed by M. Goremykine while he was reading displeased even the Octobrists and Conservatives, who had refused to vote on the address to the throne, the result being that the Douma again exceeded the rights granted by the charter of 1905 and hastened to vote in the same session, by a crushing majority, an order of the day condemning the Government and

demanding the resignation of M. Goremykine's Cabinet, and its replacement by a Ministry enjoying the confidence of the assembly.

Dating from this session the relations between the Douma and the Government grew more impossible every day. This was only natural and confirmed my forebodings, but a thing absolutely unforeseen and surprising was the form which the strife between M. Goremykine and the national assembly assumed. The Government evidently had the choice of two ways : to try sincerely to discover a common ground of understanding and collaboration with the Douma, in spite of the unfortunate beginnings, or else to break lances without further parley by dissolving the parliament and proceeding to new elections. I was in favour of the first method, while fully appreciating that the composition of the two parties to the conflict offered little chance of success. At the same time I could have understood the opposite course, in imitation of Bismarck's example in 1862 and 1863, and which would have been to send the rebellious deputies to their homes. M. Goremykine did neither the one nor the other, but took a position which, I believe, has no precedent in history—he resolved simply to ignore the Douma, affecting to consider it as a collection of tiresome persons, whose doings were of no real importance, and declaring publicly that he would not even do them the honour to argue with them, but would act as if they did not exist. He never appeared during their debates, and charged the other Ministers to follow his example, or else to send their subordinates to represent them. The preceding Cabinet had made the mistake of not preparing any bills, to speak of, for the consideration of the Douma when it met ; to be exact, there were only two demands for credits presented at its

opening, one being for the inauguration of a school and the other for the construction of a steam-laundry for the University of Yourieff. M. Goremykine not only failed to remedy this mistake, but he took pleasure in aggravating it by omitting to present any new projects to the Douma.

The results were not slow in appearing ; exasperated by the Government's attitude of disdain and lacking material for practical work, the Douma resorted to an uninterrupted series of interpellations addressed to the Ministers on the most varied subjects. There were more than three hundred of these interpellations, and they gave opportunity for the most furious attacks against the Government on such subjects as capital punishment, the provocative methods of the secret police and especially the anti-Jewish *pogroms*, which the Government was accused of organizing. M. Stolypine alone, of all the Ministers, faced the tumult and succeeded in impressing the Douma by his calm courage and the manifest sincerity of his responses ; the others made no reply, or else did so by the voice of their subordinates, which exasperated the deputies still more. On several occasions the representatives of the Government had to leave the hall of sessions most precipitately, pursued by the jeers and insults of the assembly.

Another result of the failure on the part of the Government to submit proposals for laws to be enacted by the Douma was the taking of the initiative by that body itself, and in that way the most radical bills were introduced, particularly in relation to the agrarian question, which soon became the dominating subject of discussion on account of the violent passions and agitation that it engendered. The long and heated discussions of this great question ended by provoking so decisive a collision

with the Government that it became the immediate cause of the dissolution of the first Douma.

Let us stop for a moment to examine the history of the Russian agrarian problem.

It originated with the great act by which the Emperor Alexander abolished serfdom in Russia fifty years before. Contrary to what had taken place in the countries of occidental Europe, the Russian peasants not only were given individual liberty, but were also granted lands. This particular provision of the reform of 1861 would have placed the agrarian régime in Russia on extraordinarily firm foundations, and would have assured the peasant class a future of great prosperity if, unhappily, the Government had not committed the gravest error—that of basing the régime, not on individual ownership, but on the *mir*, or collective and communal ownership, the object being not only to maintain in Russia a system which was believed to be essentially Russian in its origin, but to create a state of things that would carry out the most advanced ideas of social science. It was confidently expected that the formation of an agrarian proletariat would thereby be prevented for all time, and a revolution against individual riches and prosperity would be rendered impossible, because the aspirations of European revolutionists would be practically met by the *mir*. Inasmuch as all the land belonged to the commune and was redistributed to its members at the end of a certain period, the individual, it was claimed, would not become poor, for, even in case of the impoverishment of the father, the son still had a right to his lot of land, as the result of a new distribution. Moreover, the system of the *mir* satisfied the desires for equality, which had always been the fashion in Russia and especially at the time the agrarian law was enacted.



In reality, far from marking any progress from an economical and social point of view, the régime of the *mir* maintained and consecrated a state of affairs that was virtually a remnant of primitive times, incompatible with the demands of modern civilization, and prevented the development of agriculture as well as any improvement in the welfare of the rural class.

Was the idea of the *mir* deeply rooted in the heart of the Russian people? It will be recalled that this was the theory of the Slavophiles and that communal ownership was proclaimed by them as one of the essential principles that were to confirm the superiority of Russian civilization over that of Western Europe. We have seen that all their theories in a general way were inspired by German philosophy, and it is curious to note that in this particular question of agrarian organization the Russian lawmaker was guided in the main by a German "savant," Baron Haxthausen, who was charged by the Government to inspect the agricultural regions of Russia and present a report, which served as a basis for the agrarian law of 1861. This Westphalian *Junker*, styled "Prussian Privy Councillor" and possessed of no further scientific baggage than a study of the agrarian situation in Prussia, became, if not the inventor of the Russian *mir*, at least the most influential advocate of the nebulous conceptions of the Slavophiles, and so it is to German science that Russia is indebted for having preserved this remnant of ancient barbarism, an error from which she suffered for a long time and which she is expiating cruelly at the present hour.

Beginning with the first years of the twentieth century, the economic situation of the peasants, which had steadily grown worse under the system of the *mir*, gave rise to frequent agrarian troubles and caused the Government great anxiety. Local committees were appointed



at first to study the matter, followed by a grand commission presided over by Count Witte, and later by M. Goremykine. In 1905, as a result of several bad harvests, the reverses of the Russo-Japanese war, and the ensuing revolutionary agitation, the agrarian disturbances reached a climax. The demands of the peasants were based upon a hypothesis of the utmost simplicity: they had received a part of the lands of the great proprietors a half-century before; consequently, if they still suffered poverty, it must be because sufficient land had not been given them, and the remedy could only be found in the cession of the properties remaining in the hands of their former masters. This was a proposition particularly favourable to the revolutionary propagandists, who had little difficulty in inciting the peasants to appropriate the desired lands by violence. The Government took no measures of a comprehensive nature for a solution of the problem, and limited itself to an attempt to suppress the movement by force. No steps had even been taken to submit to the Douma the draft of a law which might have served as a basis for the discussion which was bound to take place as soon as the new assembly met. We have seen the advantage that the radical and revolutionary parties were able to derive from this situation by promising the peasants a complete realization of their aspirations and so gaining the support of the *bloc* of two hundred peasant deputies that the Government had foolishly introduced into the Douma.

The debates on the agrarian question lasted uninterruptedly until the Douma was dissolved, and gave rise to innumerable speeches which kept alive the agitation and spirit of discontent among the peasant deputies and the rural population of the most remote corners of Russia. In default of any proposal from the

Government for an agrarian law, the Douma soon had before it for consideration no less than three projects, each rivalling the other in its radical tendencies. All three enunciated unequivocally the principle of the obligatory expropriation of all lands belonging to the great proprietors, a principle which appeared to meet the almost unanimous wish of the majority of the assembly, but which had just been qualified as absolutely impossible by the governmental declaration.

The most sober of the three plans was that of the Cadet party, which practically controlled the Douma at the time. Its author was M. Hertzenstein, who was designated by that party as the spokesman of the agrarian commission appointed by the assembly. This project, while proclaiming the principle of forced expropriation, admitted the justice of a fair indemnity for the landowners and provided for the establishment of a reservation of land to be placed at the disposition of the State.

A second project, called that of the 104, went further in the radical direction, and called for the nationalization of all the lands of the Empire, and the administration thereof by local committees to be elected by the people themselves.

Finally, the extreme left of the Douma presented a plan abolishing all private ownership of land, and declaring it to be common property, which every citizen, male or female, had a right to enjoy, according to the measure in which each person could contribute personal labour.

The Government, having left the initiative to the Douma, had nothing to oppose to these three projects beyond a pallid discourse pronounced by the Minister of Agriculture, M. Stichinsky, a typical representative

of the old régime, well known for his ultra-reactionary ideas. His speech was limited to vague promises of an extension of the operations of the peasants' bank and the development of emigration to Siberia. It produced a most deplorable effect, which grew to the height of exasperation when M. Goremykine, alarmed by the turn that the debates were taking and by the agitation that they created among the peasants, but always faithful to his pose as an ignorer of the Douma, caused to be published in the official gazette a long communiqué on the agrarian question, declaring plainly that the Government did not admit the principle of forced expropriation. By choosing this manner of making known the views of the Government, *i.e.*, in addressing the country over the heads of the Douma, M. Goremykine again gave evidence of his scorn for the national assembly, and it was the form of the communication rather than its contents which roused the unanimous indignation of the deputies. The Douma at once resolved to give tit for tat, and directed the agrarian commission to draw up a direct appeal to the country, in the form of a reply to the communiqué of the official gazette. It was this step, taken *ab irato*, which sealed the fate of the Douma, for it gave M. Goremykine, as we shall see later, a pretext for denouncing this appeal to the country before the Emperor as an overt revolutionary act.

If the relations between the Government and the Douma became more strained from day to day, it was equally true that concord was far from reigning in the bosom of M. Goremykine's Cabinet. I have already mentioned its heterogeneous character ; the more its members learned to know each other, the more marked became their divergencies of opinion, preventing any agreement

on the questions submitted for their consideration. M. Goremykine, who had affected at the outset a sort of Olympian calm, and who was visibly pleased with the rôle, took no pains to conceal the little respect he had, not only for the Douma, but even for the Council of Ministers, considering that institution as a useless innovation and giving his colleagues to understand that he called them together merely for the sake of form. One can easily imagine what the meetings of the Council amounted to under such conditions: M. Goremykine presided in a tired and absent-minded fashion, hardly deigning to take notice of the contrary views expressed by its members, and generally terminated the discussions by stating that he would submit his own opinion to the Emperor for decision. If his attention was drawn to the disturbed state of affairs in the Douma, and the bad effect it might have on the country, he replied that it was all "childishness," and cited the ultra-conservative newspapers, subsidized by himself, as proof that the entire population was devoted to the monarchical power and therefore he did not let himself be influenced by anything that happened in the Palace of the Tauride. The extreme reactionary Ministers, Prince Schirinsky-Schihmatoff and M. Stichinsky, maintained an injured air, and, when expressing an opinion upon any matter, never omitted to add that no governmental activity would be possible as long as the autocratic power was not restored. M. Schwanebach wasted time in interminable digressions and attacks upon Count Witte and the preceding Cabinet, never failing to betake himself after each meeting to the Austrian Embassy, where he talked over the details of the discussion with his friend, Baron von Aerenthal, and the next morning his version thereof was known at Vienna, and at Berlin

also, no doubt. Admiral Birileff, being quite deaf, did not even try to follow the debates ; General Rudiger never uttered a word ; Messrs. Stolypine and Kokovtsoff alone endeavoured to give a serious and dignified character to the discussions, explaining clearly and competently the affairs of their respective departments, but obtaining scarcely any attention on the part of their colleagues. As for me, I felt that my efforts to bridge the gap between the Government and the Douma were doomed to failure, and served only to give me the reputation, in the minds of M. Goremykine and his friends, of being a dangerous Liberal whom it was necessary to get rid of at any cost, and with as little delay as possible.

The strange line of conduct adopted by M. Goremykine—neither to collaborate with the Douma nor to fight it, but to boycott it, so to speak—was not long in bearing fruit. The least attempt on the part of the Government to co-operate sincerely with the Douma would have been hailed with appreciation and sympathy by the numerous Moderate Liberal circles in all parts of the country, while a contrary policy, even to an immediate dissolution of the Douma, would at least have contented the reactionaries, and perhaps the bourgeois classes, who were tired of the revolutionary agitation and were always impressed by an exhibition of vigour ; but the “ non-resistance to evil,” so dear to Tolstoy, practised by M. Goremykine, was treated as an evidence of weakness, and had the effect of discrediting the Government irremediably in the eyes of an immense majority of the Russian public.

Towards the end of June the general lack of confidence in the Goremykine Cabinet manifested itself in a manner particularly apparent, à propos of the following incident.



The Government, having need of funds for the relief of the people who were suffering on account of the bad harvest, decided for the first time to present to the Douma the draft of a law providing for the opening of a credit of fifty million roubles. The Douma reduced the credit to fifteen million roubles, granted for one month, and the Council of the Empire, upon which M. Goremykine counted to restore the original figure, maintained the reduction, thus associating itself with the Douma in a vote that signified lack of confidence in the Government. This vote was a serious check for M. Goremykine, and definitely destroyed the prestige of his Cabinet even in the eyes of the Conservative party.

Seeing clearly the impossible situation in which the Government found itself, I took advantage of my personal relations with some of the members of the Moderate Liberal Party in both the Douma and the Council of the Empire to confer with them in the hope of finding some way out of the difficulty. Our conversations, in which we were joined by M. Stolypine, took a more and more interesting turn as time went on, and confirmed me in the conviction that it was entirely possible to create an understanding between the governing power and the national representation. I decided finally to try to open the eyes of the Emperor to the dangers of the situation, and inform him of the result of my investigations. The enterprise was a hazardous one, for it went contrary to all bureaucratic custom; the Emperor might easily refuse to hear the first word of such an interference on the part of his Minister of Foreign Affairs with a matter which did not strictly concern his department, but in that event I was resolved to present my resignation without further delay.

With the utmost secrecy I called together at my house



the small group of my political friends, and we drew up together a memorial which I engaged to submit to the Emperor at the first audience that might be accorded to me in the palace of Peterhof.

The writer of this memorial was a young deputy of great talent belonging to the Moderate Liberal Party, M. Lvoff. I am going to append a translation of the document *in extenso*, because it covers in a most complete and satisfactory manner the situation that presented itself in Russia at that period :

“ The relations between the Douma and the Government, as represented by the present Council of Ministers, are entirely abnormal and constitute a veritable menace to the establishment of order in the Empire.

“ All connection between the Douma and the Government is broken and an abyss has been created between them by their mutual distrust and enmity.

“ It is clear that such a state of affairs destroys all possibility of any creative work in common. This disunion arises in the first place from the very composition of the Ministry, a composition which does not respond by any means to the needs of the present political situation. The personnel of the Ministry was chosen from the ranks of the bureaucracy, and so inspires the most profound distrust on the part of the masses. It is to this same bureaucracy that all the evils afflicting Russia are imputed—the disorder and ruin at home as well as the disasters of the Japanese war—and it cannot be denied that reproaches for what has occurred in the past, whether justified or not, will always hamper any bureaucratic Ministry. The present Cabinet has not only failed to dissipate this fatal misunderstanding, but has intensified it by certain errors which it has committed.

Moreover, any Ministry recruited entirely from the bureaucracy will inevitably lack comprehension of elective assemblies, without which it is impossible to acquire the necessary authority over them. No matter what the qualities of the chief of such-and-such a department may be, neither his experience nor his good intentions will assure him pre-eminence in political life. The very habits he has acquired in the fulfilment of his bureaucratic duties will unfit him for the solution of new problems arising from the complications of a totally different situation. Therefore, while the sympathies of the people are with the Douma, all their hostility is directed against the Ministry, and this cannot help leading to consequences fatal to the administration of the State and the tranquillity of the country.

“The Douma, driven into a position of hostility to the executive power, ignored by that power and meeting with nothing but opposition therefrom, is itself forced into a course of obstinate opposition, and torn from the fertile soil of practical legislative activity. A Douma of such a nature ceases to be a pacific organ of legislation and becomes a hotbed of revolutionary passions. The present Douma, poorly equipped, it must be confessed, for legislative work because of the insufficient development of the majority of its members, cannot, however, be characterized as essentially revolutionary ; it is true that it comprises extreme elements, but these are not dominant. Its majority is composed of partisans of peaceful legislative reforms and enemies of revolution ; it is only the abnormal situation and the necessity of confining all action to itself that incites the Douma to protestation and strife against the Government. The laws drawn up by the Douma, being condemned to rejection in advance, are necessarily transformed into so many protests.

“Placed in a position of this kind, the Douma loses little by little the consciousness of forming part of the powers of the State, and becomes accustomed to regard the Government as a hostile outside force, and consequently a legitimate prey. It is an undeniable fact that the Douma, thanks to a deplorable electoral system, does not faithfully represent the entire population of Russia ; on the contrary, there are wide circles of society, having great weight and influence in the country, which are not represented at all. The peasants are far from being represented by men who express the real spirit of the agricultural class. The Douma is especially dominated by the so-called intellectuals of the cities and the semi-intellectuals of the rural districts. But in spite of all this the Douma must be recognized as a very important entity ; that which gives it strength is the hope that is centred in it, the general belief that it alone can find a solution for the crisis through which Russia is passing, and, finally, the absolute lack of faith that the country has in a bureaucratic government. In the mind of the unenlightened peasant mass there is also a superstitious idea that the Douma is omnipotent, that it can bestow land upon all and save everybody from wretchedness and famine.

“This circumstance alone is of a nature to make it, not only undesirable, but excessively dangerous to allow an open rupture to ensue between the Government and the Douma. The only way to prevent it is to re-establish the relations between the two, and that is impossible except on condition of replacing the present Cabinet by a new Ministry. It is indispensable to call to power men who are capable of acquiring influence over the Douma and maintaining control. A new Ministry can alone save the authority of the Government and restore in full

force the confidence and respect of the people. It would not be desirable, however, to have the new Ministry composed of representatives of a single party or political group. That which would best meet the exigencies of the situation would be the formation of a Ministry of mixed character. This is all the more evident because at the present moment the Government should be free of party influence and of all dependence upon narrow views and theories. In fact, the various groups in the Douma have not the character of real political parties in the exact meaning of the word, and have not yet taken definite form during the period of fermentation that Russia is now passing through, nor do they correctly represent the different social forces of the country. A Ministry made up of the members of a single party would be paralysed in its movements and hampered at every step by a network of declarations and promises made in the past. It is indispensable that a change in the direction of domestic politics shall proceed from the untrammelled initiative of the Monarch, and not be forced upon him by one or another of the parties. The Emperor is free to replace one Ministry by another, and, in doing so, to be guided by a solicitude for the general welfare, not by party exigencies arising from political conflict. This does not mean, however, that certain individual members of the Douma should not be selected for positions in the new Ministry ; on the contrary, the Government would give proof in that way of its resolve to break away from the former bureaucratic system. The present Ministry is impotent because it carries the burden of errors and traditions that are now universally condemned.

“A new situation demands new men. The formation of a Ministry in which members of the Douma participate,

besides having the advantage of exerting a salutary influence upon public opinion, will at the same time have the effect of splitting the ranks of the opposition. All the moderate elements will unite in defending the Ministry against the attacks of the extremists, who will become disorganized in consequence, and the fatal knot, which results from the distrust prevailing between the people and the ruling power and which binds the opposition to the revolutionary movement, will be cut. Finally, the mere fact of a participation by members of the Douma in the executive power will increase the efficiency of the Douma itself. It will then have a clearer idea of the complexity of problems that confront a State and will feel all the weight of power. This will calm the extremists and create the tendency toward moderation which is inevitably produced by a feeling of responsibility for action in which one shares.

“For the presidency of the Council of Ministers no better man could be chosen than the actual President of the Douma, M. Mouromtsoff, who possesses a great moral authority over the members of that body. M. Mouromtsoff, who is a man of cool disposition and positive mind, has the advantage over other public men that he is not trammelled by any party ties which might impede his political action. His extraordinary self-control and *sang-froid* would very quickly assure him the necessary authority in administrative circles. The fact that the Douma will lose a president of the first order, if M. Mouromtsoff becomes President of the Council, must not be regarded as an obstacle, for the result will be that the centre of influence will be transferred from the Douma to the Government and the Douma's importance will be correspondingly diminished. The



Government and not the Douma will then find itself in control of the transformation of Russia.

“The most difficult thing will be to find a Minister of the Interior. It is evident that the employment of armed forces and the police to repress the destructive and revolutionary movement should only be confided to a man who would be resolved to act in a most circumspect manner and at the same time to re-establish in his department the discipline and devotion to duty that are so necessary. A man must be found, therefore, who will himself be impressed by a sense of his duty to the State, the service of which at the present moment demands a complete sacrifice of the individual. Such a Minister could be found in the person of the present incumbent, M. Stolypine, or in that of M. Mouromtsoff, who might combine the functions of President of the Council with those of Minister of the Interior, on condition that he have the collaboration of M. Moukhanoff and Prince Lvoff\* as his assistants. It will be much less difficult to provide for the other Ministerial portfolios.

“It is very important that M. Schipoff be included in the Ministry, because he possesses an immense influence among certain social strata which differ widely in their political aspirations, and because he personifies a movement which has only a few representatives in the Douma, but which is very much in evidence among the members of the Zemstovs. M. Kouzmine-Karavieff might be made Minister of Justice. The participation in the Ministry of M. Milioukoff would be especially well regarded, for, although he has no seat in the Douma, his influence is very great with the public as well as with

\* Afterwards President of the first Provisional Government following the revolution of 1917.



the Douma itself. In spite of all his defects—an immense ambition and a certain tendency toward intrigue—he is a man endowed with a very keen perception and an extremely clear political sense. His entrance into the Ministry might even be unavoidable, for he would become the most vigorous defender of the Government against the attacks of the extreme left. He is the only one who would be capable of organizing a Governmental party under conditions that are as novel as they are difficult.

“The participation of members of the Douma in the Ministry will not only result in replacing the present Ministers with new men, but will transfer the initiative of reform from the Douma to the Government. The only reforms that will parry the blows of the revolutionary movement are those that may issue from the executive power. This method must be adopted with courage and resolution.”

On the 8th of July, after having finished the verbal report on foreign matters that I used to make to the Emperor once a week at the Peterhof Palace, I took up resolutely the subject of the domestic situation of Russia. The Emperor listened with great benevolence to what I had to say, made no objection to receiving from my hands the memorial, which I had brought in my portfolio, and promised to study it carefully. This was a point gained at the start, and I returned to the city full of hope that the remarkable *exposé* drawn up by M. Lvoff would produce the desired effect upon the mind of the Emperor, who had appeared in a general way to be animated by intentions comparatively conciliatory toward the Douma.

Some days after the presentation of the memorial I was summoned by the Emperor, who told me that he had read it with great interest and had been struck by the force and the justice of some of the arguments contained therein. I seized this opportunity to enlarge, with all the eloquence of which I was capable, upon the principal points of the document, and to try to convince the Emperor of the urgency of putting them in effect by replacing M. Goremykine's Cabinet with a coalition Ministry, in which the members of the Douma and of the Council of the Empire should be largely represented. I begged him to make an effort to go outside of the narrow circle to which he had limited himself hitherto for the choice of his Ministers ; belonging myself to the *milieu* of the provincial nobility and the Zemstvos, I guaranteed that class to be no less loyal to the monarchy than the bureaucracy, which formed an impassable barrier between the throne and the people. "The only end," I said, "that my political friends and I have in view is to strengthen the executive power, dangerously shaken by the revolutionary disturbances and by the mistakes that the Government has committed. Do not be afraid to place trust in us, even if we may appear to be imbued with too liberal ideas. Again, nothing so tempers radicalism as the responsibilities that come with power ; in the course of my long diplomatic career, passed among widely-differing peoples and in all latitudes, I have seen many public men, who were notorious for their radical tendencies as long as they were in the opposition, become the surest guardians of order and authority. Has it not been said with good reason that the best police are recruited from the ranks of the smugglers ? Is it possible to believe that men like M. Mouromtsoff, M. Schipoff and Prince Lvoff, all of whom are important

landowners and so vitally interested in the maintenance of tranquillity and a peaceful solution of the agrarian question, are less dependable and less conservative than bureaucrats of the order of M. Schwanebach, who have no attachment to the soil and whose only solicitude is to cling to the emoluments which they receive on the twentieth day of each month ? ”

Passing then to another series of arguments, I drew the Emperor's attention, in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the impression produced by our interior crisis upon foreign Cabinets and European public opinion. I explained that beyond the frontiers of Russia there was unanimous condemnation of the proceedings of M. Goremykine's Ministry, and that no one hoped for the re-establishment of normal conditions in Russia until other men came into power and other policies were inaugurated. This obstructed in advance any steps we might take in our foreign relations and, as the Finance Minister undoubtedly could testify, destroyed the foundations of our financial credit.

As I went on, I had the satisfaction of perceiving that the Emperor appeared to waver more and more. He made, however, numerous objections. In his eyes the Douma was entirely dominated by a most dangerous spirit, and resembled a revolutionary meeting rather than a parliamentary assembly. Under such conditions, what chances were there of bringing it to order by the means which I proposed ? Would not a like concession be regarded as a proof of weakness on the part of the monarchical power, and would it not be necessary, all the same, to have recourse to energetic measures after a very short time ?

I replied to these objections that, even supposing

we were completely mistaken, and the Douma continued to be intractable, the situation could hardly be made worse by following our counsels, because, if it should become necessary to dissolve the Douma, there would be every advantage in not having proceeded to that extreme until after a sincere endeavour had been made to arrive at an understanding. The whole country would be grateful to the Sovereign, and if it became evident that his endeavour had failed of success because of a revolutionary predilection on the part of the Douma the sane elements of the nation would support the Government all the more willingly in the direction of repression. It was not improbable that, after having exhausted all effort at conciliation, the Sovereign might have to resort to the establishment of martial law, but, even so, anything would be preferable to the actual situation that had been created by an impotent Government, which had become a laughing-stock in Russia as well as abroad.

At the close of the audience, which had lasted for more than an hour, the Emperor, without committing himself to any definite course, authorized me to enter into *pourparlers* with the personages mentioned in the memorial, as well as with others whom circumstances might render available, with a view to the formation of a coalition Cabinet. It was understood at the same time that I should be seconded in this task by M. Stolypine, to whom the Emperor wrote a few words with his own hand for me to convey to my colleague.

On my return to St. Petersburg I hastened to carry out the plan. In accord with M. Stolypine I had secret interviews with the leading members of the Douma, beginning with its president, M. Mouromtsoff, and for my negotiations with the Council of the Empire I sought

the aid of my cousin, M. Yermoloff, who played a prominent part therein as president of the Moderate Liberal group or centre. M. Yermoloff belonged, like myself, to the class of the provincial nobility, and was distinguished for his vast knowledge of agronomy. His acquirements in that science were well known, not only in Russia, but also in foreign countries, France especially, where he had published several books on the subject. During the reign of the Emperor Alexander III. he was Minister of Agriculture, and continued to hold that office for some time under Nicholas II. In spite of his bureaucratic connections M. Yermoloff allied himself with the Moderate Liberals in the Council of the Empire, and at the period of which I am now speaking he was recognized as the leader of that party in the Upper Chamber. It was at his house that my secret conferences took place with the members of that assembly whom we had chosen to take part in the new Cabinet. M. Stolypine engaged in parallel conferences, and every night we compared results.

In the opinion of all the political leaders whom we consulted the most natural candidate for the presidency of the Council of Ministers was M. Mouromtzoff, who enjoyed the full confidence of the Douma and the sympathies of the people, but it was well known that the Emperor did not regard him with favour, and serious obstacles were feared on that account. The next available candidate, M. Schipoff, particularly influential with the Zemstvos, had a better chance of being welcomed at Peterhof, but was needed more for the Ministry of the Interior. The great difficulty was to find a portfolio for M. Milioukoff, who, it was feared, on account of his strong position as chief of the Cadet Party and his ambition to rule, would not be content to take a secondary



place, but would demand for his party and himself the leading rôle.

All these preliminaries had occupied a certain time, and we were just on the point of terminating our labours preparatory to a conference with M. Milioukoff, who had not yet been sounded by us, when events suddenly took a critical turn. It was the 8th of July when I presented the memorial to the Emperor; on the 17th the Douma entered upon a discussion of the proposed appeal to the country, which, it will be recalled, was to serve as a reply to the Government's communiqué on the agrarian question. This was the occasion that M. Goremykine was looking for, as a pretext for a decisive battle. Three days later he called a meeting of the Council of Ministers and declared, without even deigning to ask the opinion of his colleagues, that the Douma having openly taken up a revolutionary attitude he had decided to propose to the Emperor on the following day an immediate dissolution of that assembly. The members of the Council were requested at the same time to meet at M. Goremykine's house on that day, *i.e.*, the 21st of July, to await his return from Peterhof, bearing the ukase for the dissolution of the Douma, after obtaining the Emperor's signature.

What was it that caused M. Goremykine to make this hasty decision? Did he have wind of our *pourparlers*, entered into with the utmost secrecy, with the Douma and the Council of the Empire? It is more than probable, but I have never been able to find out. However that may be, I knew too well the character of the Emperor to doubt for a moment the outcome of M. Goremykine's plan; I saw all my hopes crushed; there was nothing left for me to do but to present my resignation to the Emperor, once the ukase was signed, and I was



firmly resolved to resign, as was also M. Stolypine, who shared my sentiments and was prepared to follow me in retirement from office.

Both M. Stolypine and I had to take certain measures of precaution in view of the grave event which was impending ; he, as Minister of the Interior, was obliged to provide for the maintenance of public order, which might easily be disturbed by the dissatisfaction that would be likely to follow the dissolution of the Douma, and to cope with this eventuality he decided to call in the troops of the guard who were then in the training corps near the capital ; it devolved upon me to see that none of the embassies or legations should suffer from possible riots. It was especially necessary to look out for hostile demonstrations against the German Embassy, for the Kaiser was suspected by the public of giving Emperor Nicholas advice in a reactionary sense, but, as it was impossible to give ostensible protection to that embassy alone, it became necessary to take measures applicable to all the foreign representatives. On the following morning I addressed a circular to all the Ambassadors and heads of foreign missions, warning them that strikes were expected in some of the factories in the capital and, as a popular movement might result, detachments of troops would be posted in the neighbourhood of their residences on the night of July 21st-22nd, to give them such protection as might be required, in case of need. I added that the troops were forbidden to cross the thresholds of the diplomatic premises unless directly invited by the head of an embassy or mission. Having taken these precautions, I spent the day in setting everything in order at the Ministry of Foreign Relations, so as to be able to turn over my duties to my eventual successor with as little delay as possible.

Here it seems necessary to mention in parenthesis a statement that has been made verbally and in print\* to the effect that, when all co-operative relations between M. Goremykine's Cabinet and the Douma had become manifestly impossible, toward the end of June, General Trépoff, who was then Commandant of the Imperial Palace, took the initiative of forming a Cadet Cabinet, and his failure to come to terms with the leaders of that party led directly to the dissolution of the Douma.

I believe I may testify that this story, although true in part, is not entirely exact. As far as I know—and I think I am particularly well informed on this subject—at the precise moment of which I speak, immediately before the dissolution, there had been no other authoritative *pourparlers* with regard to the formation of a new Cabinet than those which the Emperor had requested M. Stolypine and me to undertake. Soon after the dissolution, however, under circumstances to be discussed later, General Trépoff did actually conceive the idea of getting together a Cabinet from the ranks of the Cadet Party, and conferred with the representatives of that party with that end in view. I am perhaps the only one to-day who knows in all its details the singular rôle played by General Trépoff on that occasion, and, since revelations only partially correct have been made on the subject, in Russia as well as abroad, I will make it my duty to furnish in the next chapter more precise and more complete information than has heretofore been available in connection therewith.

The night of the 21st of July I dined at the British Embassy with Sir Arthur Nicolson, now Lord Carnock,

\* See "*La Vie Politique dans les Deux Mondes*," published under the direction of Achille Viallate. *Ière Année. Empire Russe*, par M. Paul Boyer.

whose name will often appear in the following chapters of this book. One of the very few guests was Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, who had already had a brilliant career in journalism as correspondent of the *Times* before and during the Russo-Turkish war, and who was then in charge of the foreign political department of that great English organ. He was considered in England as the foremost authority on Russian affairs, having written a remarkable book on Russia, which he was occupied in amending, to bring it down to contemporary events. He spoke Russian with a fluency which he had acquired during several years which he passed in the heart of the Russian provinces, living with the humble family of a village priest. He was acquainted with all the different classes of Russian society, and when the Emperor Nicholas made his great journey to the Orient as heir to the throne Sir Donald Wallace was attached to his person by the British Government during the Emperor's stay in India. He was, therefore, personally known to the Emperor and also highly esteemed, so much so that King Edward VII. took advantage of the fact to send him on a confidential mission to St. Petersburg at the time of which I am now speaking. The purpose of this mission was to study the domestic situation of Russia, which was causing considerable anxiety in London, and to serve as a counsellor to Sir Arthur Nicolson, who was still new at his post and not yet *au courant* of things Russian. Sir Donald performed this task with great intelligence and tact. He was received in audience by the Emperor, to whom he spoke with entire frankness of his observations, taking pains to support the ideas of the Moderate Liberals. I had frequent interviews with him and, as we were naturally in full agreement on the subject and I could count entirely on his discretion,

I had informed him of my negotiations for the formation of a new Cabinet.

While talking with him after dinner on the balcony of the Embassy, where we enjoyed a superb view of the Neva, Sir Donald soon took notice of the state of discouragement into which I had been plunged by the shattering of my hopes, and questioned me closely regarding the situation. I did not try to hide from him that events had taken an unfavourable turn, but I could not reveal the dramatic stroke that was preparing for the morrow. At this moment we were rejoined by Sir Arthur Nicolson, who asked me what the exact reason was for the circular that he had received that day. Having no right to tell him the whole truth I could only reply that the Government had reason to expect serious disorders the next day, but that he need have no fear for the security of his Embassy.

From the British Embassy I walked along the quays to the residence of M. Goremykine, where the members of the Council of Ministers were to await his return from Peterhof. Even at that late hour the Neva, majestic in its bed of granite, still reflected the sickly light of an invisible sun, which only dips below the horizon of St. Petersburg for a few minutes at that time of year. When evoking the memory of that night, after twelve years have passed, I am again conscious in all its force of the feeling of profound sadness which oppressed me at that moment, when Russia, already so severely tried by suffering and discord, was about to enter upon a path at whose end I could foresee naught but new and still more cruel trials. The melancholy induced by the picture that I saw before me intensified that feeling, and I remember that as I went on my way and thought of all the misfortunes that my

country was enduring I repeated involuntarily these lines of one of our poets, who imagines Night herself as a prey to pitiless insomnia :

“ While on my tireless way I come and go  
 Above you, I look down with anxious eyes  
 Upon such agony and tears and woe  
 That sleep even to me its balm denies. . . . ”

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In M. Goremykine's study I found all the members of the Council of Ministers waiting, with the exception of M. Stolypine, who had remained at the Ministry of the Interior to superintend the precautionary measures rendered necessary by the *coup de force* that was to take place on the following day. While awaiting the return of M. Goremykine the Council dispatched a few routine affairs, and finally, toward midnight, we heard the bell announcing the arrival of the President of the Council. Presently we saw, framed in the doorway, his figure—truly that of the typical bureaucrat. Assuming his grand Court manner, and standing on the threshold, he addressed us in French, using the following phrase, which he had evidently concocted with great care on his way back : “ *Eh bien, messieurs, je vous dirai comme Madame de Sévigné apprenant à sa fille le mariage secret de Louis XIV. : ‘ Je vous le donne en cent, je vous le donne en mille, devinez ce qui se passe.’* ”\*

On hearing these words I had a faint glimmer of hope that the proposal of dissolution had been rejected by the Emperor, but my hope was of short duration. After enjoying for a moment our astonishment, M. Goremykine announced that he had in his portfolio

\* “ Well, gentlemen, I will say to you as did Madame de Sévigné when she told her daughter of the secret marriage of Louis XIV : ‘ I give you a hundred chances, I give you a thousand chances—guess what has happened.’ ”

the ukase of dissolution, signed by the Emperor, but that at the same time His Majesty had deigned to relieve him of the duties of President of the Council, and had decided to appoint as his successor M. Stolypine, who would receive from the Sovereign further instructions as to other changes in the Cabinet.

\* \* \* \* \*

Early the next morning the ukase of dissolution appeared in the official gazette, and when the deputies presented themselves at the Tauride Palace they found it occupied by the soldiery and were not allowed to cross the threshold. Some attempted demonstrations in the streets near by were easily stopped by the police. In short, there was no serious disorder anywhere in the capital, and the success of this first *coup de force* appeared to justify those who had maintained that the Government had only to make some show of energy to impose its will upon the revolutionary elements.



## CHAPTER VII

### M. STOLYPINE AND THE CADETS

THE Emperor's decision, not only to dissolve the Douma, but at the same time to put M. Stolypine at the head of the Government in place of M. Goremykine, was a veritable *coup de théâtre* that no one had expected, and least of all M. Goremykine himself. It sprang from the personal initiative of Nicholas II., who hoped by that means to extenuate the bad impression that the dismissal of the assembly was liable to create throughout the country. In reality, however, it met the fate of all half-measures; that is to say, it failed to satisfy anybody. The parties of the Opposition, without excepting the Moderate Liberals, regarded it as the preface to a complete abrogation of the charter of 1905, while the reactionaries were indignant at the slight of which M. Goremykine was the victim and at the appointment of a man whom they considered to be tainted with Liberalism.

As for M. Stolypine, he was entirely taken by surprise. He had worked with me in the utmost sincerity toward preparing a way for the formation of a coalition Cabinet, in which he was ready to take a secondary place under the direction of a person enjoying the confidence of the Douma, but he did not consider himself as designated,

nor as entirely fitted, for the leading rôle in the Government. Still, the moment was too critical to admit of any long hesitation on his part, and, having been received in audience by the Emperor on the day after the dissolution, he had no choice but to accept the heavy task imposed upon him. At the same time, he made it a condition that two of the Ministers, M. Stichinsky and Prince Schirinsky-Schihmatoff, who had made themselves conspicuously odious by their reactionary tendencies, should be dismissed at once. He also reserved expressly the right to further alter the character of the Cabinet by adding members of the Douma and the Council of the Empire, in accordance with our original plan.

The situation was unnecessarily complicated by the thoughtless attitude adopted by a great number of the deputies, an attitude for which I hold the Cadet Party responsible, for it was that party that virtually controlled the Douma. On this occasion, as was often the case, unfortunately, the leaders of the Cadets, and especially M. Milioukoff, conducted themselves as doctrinaires devoid of a true sense of the practical side of politics, with the result that their party voluntarily missed the chance to play a part at that juncture of circumstances, which would have brought them naturally into power, had they known how to meet the situation with calmness and moderation.

The ukase pronouncing the dissolution announced at the same time that the next Douma would be convoked on March 5th, 1907. This provision characterized the Emperor's act as rightful for any constitutional Sovereign and in entire accordance with the charter of 1905. The sole flaw was the omission to fix a date for the new elections, but this was only an error of form, and was

rectified soon after ; the act of July 21st was none the less constitutional in itself. It was, as remarked in the French Press, not a 2nd of December, but a 16th of May. The merest good sense indicated that it was all to the advantage of the Cadet Party to regard it as such, because it was sure of victory in the coming elections, a majority in the second Douma and a part in the Government as "His Majesty's Opposition."

This was the way that matters were envisaged abroad, especially in England. At the very moment of the dissolution a delegation from the Douma happened to be in London, taking part in the Inter-Parliamentary Conference. In welcoming this delegation, the British Prime Minister, who had just heard news of the event, pronounced these words, so widely echoed and commented upon : "The Douma is dead : long live the Douma !" Mr. Campbell-Bannerman clearly intended to emphasize by this phrase his view of the dissolution as a perfectly normal act, involving no attack upon the existence of the Douma as an institution ; but such was the ignorance of constitutional law in our Governmental circles that his exclamation was taken for a challenge and an impertinence addressed to the Emperor. I had the greatest trouble to explain to my colleagues and to convince the Emperor himself that Mr. Campbell-Bannerman had only paraphrased, in applying it to the Douma, the time-honoured announcement which expressed in ante-Revolutionary France the idea of the continuity of the monarchical principle : *Le Roi est mort : vive le Roi !* "

Instead of adopting the construction indicated by the British Prime Minister, the Cadet leaders incited a great body of the deputies to take a most imprudent step. One hundred and ninety members of the Douma

met in Finland, under the presidency of M. Mouromtsoff, and there signed the famous appeal to the Russian people known as the "manifesto of Wyborg."

In this manifesto the Government was denounced for having punished the Douma solely because that assembly had demanded the forced expropriation of the land in favour of the peasants. At the same time the Russian people were exhorted to defend the rights of the representatives of the nation by refusing to pay the taxes, to furnish recruits for the army, and to recognize any loan that the Government might issue without the consent of the Douma. The manifesto terminated with these words, which amounted to a call for revolution: "Not a copeck for the Treasury, then, not a soldier for the army; be firm in your refusal; defend your rights, all, as one man; no force can resist the inflexible will of the people. Citizens, in this inevitable struggle, we whom you have elected will stand by you."

We know, of course, that the manifesto of Wyborg fell flat, so to speak, because the people possessed more political good sense than the leaders of the Cadet Party supposed. When they realized their mistake some time afterwards, they tried to justify themselves by alleging that their object had been to forestall revolutionary manifestations of still more serious character, as, for example, an uprising of the peasants in the Volga region, etc. I believe, however, that this puerile act was quite simply an expression of their pet theories and their lack of political experience.

M. Stolypine had the good judgment not to take the Wyborg prank seriously. He let the signers of the manifesto return to St. Petersburg unmolested, and only as a matter of form instituted judiciary proceedings

against them, which, however, resulted in rendering the principal Cadet leaders ineligible for election to the next Douma. M. Milioukoff, not being a deputy, had not signed the Wyborg manifesto, and so escaped prosecution. Another prominent Cadet, M. Roditcheff, happened to be with the delegation in London at the time, and likewise avoided the fate of the majority of his comrades.

While the Cadets were exhorting the people to oppose to the Government a passive resistance, consisting in the refusal of taxes and recruits, the Socialists attempted recourse to the means which had been so successful in 1905; in other words, the organization of a general strike. This had no better luck than the manifesto of Wyborg, being quickly suppressed without any of the public services having suffered any serious inconvenience.

Of much graver importance were the military revolts which took place at that period in different parts of the Empire. Already in the month of June trouble had broken out in one of the regiments of the Imperial Guard, and what especially disturbed the Emperor in connection with the incident was the fact that he himself had passed a part of his military apprenticeship in that very regiment—that of Préobrajensky—and considered it to be particularly devoted to the monarchical cause. It turned out, however, that the disturbance had no political meaning, and was due to defects in the command, to remedy which the necessary steps were quickly taken. But at the end of July and the beginning of August mutinies that could be clearly attributed to revolutionary propaganda followed thick and fast at Cronstadt and at Sveaborg, within a short distance of the capital.

I recall vividly how trying a moment this was for

M. Stolypine, who had just come into power and had not yet had time to master the details of his new duties. The Russian army, after having been beaten in Manchuria, had come back to its cantonments precisely at that period. The reverses which it had suffered produced the natural effect of diminishing the soldiers' respect for their officers, and, besides, they had traversed on their homeward march the vast region of Siberia, where the revolutionary movement of 1905 had gained great headway. The majority of the soldiers belonged to the peasant class, and consequently were especially accessible to the agitation kept up by the Socialists in the interest of their agrarian campaign. For these reasons the Government had grave doubts whether the army would adhere to its old spirit of discipline or would run the risk of being contaminated by the revolutionary propaganda.

M. Stolypine came out of this first dangerous crisis with honour. The military revolts were suppressed without recourse to an excessive severity, and the facility with which the Government obtained the mastery was the best evidence that the Russian army, in spite of all the misfortunes that it had suffered, remained faithful to its chiefs.

It was on the occasion of the Cronstadt revolt that I had a chance to observe for the first time the Emperor's self-control and his power of retaining a calm demeanour in the face of untoward circumstances. This faculty, which he possessed to an extraordinary degree, of self-mastery even in the midst of tragic events, gave rise to widely varying and sometimes very unjust interpretations. It was regarded as a proof of a sort of innate insensibility and even an atrophy of moral sense. This, in fact, is the explanation given by Dr. Dillon in "The



Eclipse of Russia." But having passed more than one critical moment at the side of Emperor Nicholas I am convinced of the absolute falsity of that opinion, and I desire with all my heart to show in its true light this particular phase of my unfortunate Sovereign's character.

On the day when the mutiny reached its culminating point, I happened to be with the Emperor, making my weekly verbal report concerning the affairs of my department. It was at Peterhof, in the Imperial villa, situated on the border of the Gulf of Finland, facing the island on which stands the fortress of Cronstadt, some fifteen kilometres distant. I was seated before the Emperor at a little table placed in a bay-window giving upon the sea. From the window could be distinguished in the distance the line of fortifications, and as I lay before the Emperor the different matters of interest we heard distinctly the cannonade, which seemed to grow louder from one minute to another. He listened attentively, and, as was his habit, asked questions now and then, showing his interest in the smallest detail of my report. Glance as I would in his direction, I could not detect the slightest trace of emotion in his countenance, although he knew well that it was his crown that was at stake at that moment, only a few leagues away. If the fortress remained in the hands of the mutineers, not only the situation of the capital would become very precarious, but his own fate and that of his family would be seriously menaced, for the cannon of Cronstadt could prevent any attempt at flight by sea.

When my report was finished, the Emperor remained a few moments looking calmly out of the open window at the line of the horizon. For my part, I was oppressed by a profound emotion, and could not refrain, even at

the risk of infringing the rules of etiquette, from expressing my surprise at seeing him so unmoved. The Emperor did not apparently resent my observation, for he turned to me with a look which has so often been described as of extraordinary gentleness, and replied in these few words, deeply engraven in my memory :

“ If you see me so calm, it is because I have the firm, the absolute conviction that the fate of Russia, my own fate and that of my family, is in the hands of God, Who placed me where I am. Whatever happens, I will bow to His will, conscious of never having had a thought other than that of serving the country that He confided to me.”

That same night the revolt was definitely subdued, and I knew that he had received the news with the same *sang-froid* with which he had listened to the sound of the cannon a few hours before.

Often since then I have had occasion to verify the impressions that I formed on that day, and I have never had reason to change them in any respect. I am profoundly convinced that the source from which Emperor Nicholas derived his serenity and his faith in the providential character of his destiny was a religious sentiment of a rare intensity. I will speak further of this essential trait when I attempt his portraiture, and will merely mention at this point the sort of mysticism which ruled over the mind of Nicholas II. ever afterwards, and which the tragic events of his reign and the influence of a feminine nature even more *exaltée* than his own only served to increase.

I have already said that M. Stolypine had reserved the right to submit to the Emperor a change in the Cabinet membership by means of the introduction of elements outside of the bureaucracy. In accordance with the

plan set forth in the memorial which I had presented to the Emperor, he had in view the formation of a coalition Government, in which the principal parties would be represented, with the sole exception of such groups as were clearly revolutionary in their aims. Despite the attitude of the Cadets, M. Stolypine did not give up the idea of bringing into the Cabinet M. Milioukoff, who had come out unscathed from the Wyborg escapade. On the day after his appointment he set to work on his project, commencing by asking me to retain the portfolio of Foreign Affairs in the new Cabinet, and to continue to take part in the *pourparlers* with those whom he had in view for the different Ministerial positions.

M. Stolypine occupied at that time, in the immediate suburbs of St. Petersburg, a country house, or *datcha*, situated on one of the islands of the Neva estuary. This house belonged to the State, and served as a summer residence for the Ministers of the Interior; it was of quite modest appearance, but possessed a beautiful garden. Anyone who has lived at St. Petersburg in the summer-time, must remember the peculiar charm of the islands in the Neva, with their many villas standing out from a background of dense foliage and reflected in the clear surface of the river. I lived at the time in the palace of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and every day, late in the afternoon, I went to M. Stolypine's *datcha*, to confer with him and to meet the different political leaders who were summoned in turn. These conferences lasted sometimes until a very late hour of the night, and I have a vivid recollection of my rapid drives across the islands in the wonderfully clear nights of July. M. Milioukoff will remember, I am sure, how, after a conference in which he had taken part, and

finding himself without a carriage to take him back to the city, he accepted the offer of a place in mine. It was almost morning by that time; we were in an open victoria, and all the way back we passed other carriages, returning from the many pleasure resorts near by, when it suddenly occurred to me what a strange impression must be produced by the sight of the Minister of Foreign Affairs driving at four o'clock in the morning with the chief of the Cadets, who had only just returned from Wyborg, and whom the public had every reason to suppose to be in prison. I mentioned it to my companion, who replied that he had just thought of it himself, and that we both ran the risk of being seriously compromised—he in the eyes of the Opposition, and I in those of the Conservatives. There was nothing to do but laugh heartily at the situation, which, by the way, had no disagreeable outcome. Luckily none of the smart officers or young diplomats with whom I exchanged salutations recognized M. Milioukoff, and so failed to notice the odd companionship.

The attempt to form a coalition Cabinet met with no success. After a fortnight's negotiations, and in spite of all the efforts made by M. Stolypine, the different personages with whom he had conferred declined, one after the other. Like Count Witte the year previous, M. Stolypine found himself confronted with the utter impossibility of introducing in the Government any public men who were strangers to the bureaucratic and Court circles. He decided to fill, for the moment, only the two posts vacated by M. Stichinsky and Prince Schirinsky-Schihmatoff, and offered them to Prince Boris Wassiltchikoff, who became Minister of Agriculture, and to my brother, Pierre Iswolsky, whom he named Attorney-General of the Holy Synod, *i.e.*,

Minister of Public Worship. Neither of the two belonged to the real bureaucracy; Prince Wassiltchikoff, a great landowner and Marshal of the Nobility for Novgorod, was an elected member of the Council of the Empire, and had no connection with the official world, except as Vice-President of the Red Cross, an institution placed under the direct authority of the Empress Dowager; my brother, who had had a brilliant University career and made a speciality of educational subjects, had been entrusted a short time previous with the duties of assistant to the Minister of Public Instruction. Both Prince Wassiltchikoff and my brother had the reputation of being Moderate Liberals with Octobrist sympathies. M. Stolypine regarded these two appointments as merely provisional, for, in spite of the disappointment he had suffered in the failure of his cherished plans, he did not give up hope of forming a coalition Cabinet, and intended to try again at the opening of the second Douma.

What were the exact causes of M. Stolypine's failure? It might seem at first blush that the very plan of a coalition Cabinet was impracticable, and that his mistake, and mine as well, was in insisting upon such a combination, instead of carrying out at once the idea of a Cabinet, composed only of Cadets, as planned—*mirabile dictu*—by General Trépoff. Often since that time I have pondered over the dilemma, and I have always come to the same conclusion, that M. Stolypine and I were in the right. It must not be forgotten that, at the period we are discussing, even a Cabinet headed by M. Stolypine, but with the addition of elements not strictly bureaucratic, appeared to be an innovation full of danger to the Emperor, who had only consented to it with great misgiving. Nevertheless, such a Cabinet



would have meant a long step forward, and would have opened the way for further progress in the direction of constitutional government, while the scheme of forming immediately a Cadet Cabinet would, on the contrary, have led certainly to a violent conflict between the Supreme Power and the new Government, which would have demanded at the start that its complete party programme should be carried out, embodying radical reforms to which the Emperor would not have consented.

In refusing their co-operation to M. Stolypine, the Moderate Liberals, like Prince Lvoff, Count Heyden and others, again made a serious mistake, and showed how unripe the political parties in Russia were at that time and how they were controlled by the passions of the moment. The real cause of their refusal was that the dissolution of the Douma had produced in all the Liberal circles, even the most moderate, a strong feeling of discontent, and consequently those personages were afraid of losing their prestige and their influence in the country if they should join the Government just then. M. Stolypine realized this very well, and was influenced thereby to put off the execution of his plan until the opening of the second Douma, when political passions would have had time to calm down and the public would have been persuaded of the loyal intentions of the Prime Minister.

Here comes in the very curious episode of General Trépoff's scheme for the formation of a Cabinet to be composed purely of Cadets. Before proceeding to throw full light upon this incident, I will say that my recital may possibly err in certain minor details of a material order, simply because several of those details are still unknown to me. It rests with M. Milioukoff



and those of his friends who treated with General Trépoff to adjust any such points, and I accept their rectifications in advance, but as for the essential features of the affair, I am the only one who is able at the present time to make them known.

I repeat what I have already declared, that before the dissolution of the Douma there had been no *authorized pourparlers* for the formation of a Cabinet other than those with which M. Stolypine and I had been entrusted by the Emperor and which were abruptly interfered with by M. Goremykine's action. Now, it has been stated\* that General Trépoff began negotiating for the formation of a Cadet ministry in the latter part of June; also that, on the very eve of the day when the ukase of dissolution was published, the Cadets, confident of their success, were planning the distribution of the ministerial portfolios among themselves. These facts, of which neither M. Stolypine nor I had knowledge, may be materially true, but if so it presupposes that General Trépoff had commenced to treat with the Cadets, not only without the consent, but without the knowledge of the Emperor.

On the other hand, a few days after the dissolution, M. Stolypine was surprised to learn, through a secret channel at first and then from the lips of the Emperor himself, that the Prefect of the Palace had declared in favour of the formation of a Cadet ministry, and that he was conferring on the subject with M. Milioukoff and other members of his party.

This revelation gave us great concern, as General Trépoff was known to be the most fervent partisan of autocracy and the soul of the reactionary party. It

\* A. VIALATE. "*La Vie Politique dans les Deux Mondes.*" Article de M. Paul Boyer, "*Empire Russe.*"

was impossible to believe that M. Milioukoff's eloquence had converted him to the radical views of the Cadet Party. It was equally inadmissible that he had been influenced by the threats of that party. His bravery was above suspicion; in the most critical days of the revolutionary troubles of 1905 he had displayed a remarkable *sang-froid*, and his order of the day, issued to the troops about to attack the rioters: "Don't spare your cartridges," had become famous. How then could one admit that this soldier, courageous to excess and devoted to the extent of fanaticism to the cause of absolute monarchy, would be capable of entering into a compact with a party whose declared purpose was to reduce the Emperor to the rôle of a constitutional monarch?

It did not require much time nor any great effort to find the answer to this enigma. Driven to the wall by M. Stolypine, General Trépoff could do no other than reveal a part of his plan at least, and the remainder was easily guessed.

This, then, was the truth of the matter. General Trépoff, unswerving in his fidelity to the principle of absolute monarchy, feared only one thing in reality, and that was the success of any effort to bring the Emperor under the influence of the Moderate Liberal parties and so consolidate the order of things established by the charter of 1905. He saw the Emperor yielding little by little to the counsels of M. Stolypine and to mine, and he considered it an imperative duty to prevent at any price the formation of the coalition Cabinet which we were advocating. It was then that the idea occurred to him that the surest means of thwarting our plan was to set up a ministry composed purely of Cadets. He calculated with good reason that such a Cabinet,

at the very start, would not fail to enter into a violent conflict with the Emperor; as soon as that happened he would take strong measures, with the aid of the troops in the capital, to suppress the Cadet Government and substitute a military dictatorship of which he himself would be the chief. From that point to the abrogation of the charter of 1905 there was only a step, and that step General Trépoff was firmly resolved to take, without the slightest doubt.

It was a few days after the dissolution of the Douma that General Trépoff unfolded this audacious plan to the Emperor. Was Nicholas II. tempted to adopt it, and did he permit himself to give some encouragement to the General? His vacillating nature and his tendency to revert to the old order of things do not exclude this possibility. It is certain, at least, that he had knowledge of the *pourparlers* that took place between the Prefect of the Palace and M. Milioukoff, but it is also certain that, even if he had been fascinated at first by the General's propositions, he did not decide to approve them without previously consulting M. Stolypine, to whom, in fact, he communicated them of his own accord at the earliest opportunity. M. Stolypine naturally opposed the scheme with all his might, and after a short struggle with General Trépoff came off entirely victorious. The Emperor, thoroughly convinced by the arguments of his Prime Minister, ordered General Trépoff to desist from his project and to break off his dealings with M. Milioukoff. The General was compelled to bow before the express will of his Sovereign, but he cherished a bitter hatred against M. Stolypine. From that day the Emperor's demeanour toward the Prefect of the Palace showed a marked coldness, indicating to such an extent his loss of favour that it may

have had much to do with his sudden death shortly after, toward the middle of September, while the Emperor was cruising on his yacht off the coast of Finland. His tragic end gave rise naturally to many rumours, and suicide was suspected in some quarters. A careful inquest was secretly conducted, and pronounced that death was caused by the rupture of an aneurism, but it is more than probable that the disease of the heart from which General Trépoff suffered was aggravated by the shock which he had undergone in the failure of his project and the consequent forfeit of his master's favour.

In revealing the true facts connected with this incident, it is not my purpose to tarnish the memory of General Trépoff, for, while disagreeing with his political ideas and condemning his methods, I have always respected and even admired his energy, his indomitable courage and his unbounded devotion to the person of his Sovereign. In planning his *coup de force* he was merely following his profound conviction that the safety of Russia and of the monarchical principle demanded at any cost a return to autocratic government. I even believe that the prospect of becoming dictator was of secondary importance to him. Soon after the Emperor had quashed his plans, I had quite a long conversation with him at Peterhof, in the course of which he freely admitted the purpose of his *pourparlers* with the Cadets, and I recall that on that occasion, as also when I met him during the critical days of October, 1905, he gave me the impression of a man endowed with remarkable force of will.

Is it true that M. Milioukoff and the other Cadet leaders took General Trépoff's propositions seriously and believed that they were about to attain power with

his assistance? Certain distinguished writers in sympathy with the Cadets, as, for example, M. Paul Boyer, have so asserted. Personally, I have not been able to persuade myself of this, for it would throw doubt upon their perspicacity and their appreciation of political eventualities; I rather think that M. Milioukoff was "beating about the bush" in his talks with General Trépoff on the one hand, and with M. Stolypine on the other, pending the moment when the certain triumph of his party in the next elections would make him master of the situation.

As far as concerns the Emperor's behaviour on this occasion toward General Trépoff and M. Stolypine, it was particularly characteristic and may serve to throw light upon a number of subsequent episodes. Easily influenced by the force of natures stronger than his own, especially when it happened to be exerted in the direction of his reactionary tendencies, Nicholas II. was nevertheless open to arguments which appealed to his good sense and his innate integrity. This explains why M. Stolypine, endowed as he was with a strong will as well as a keen sense of justice, had little difficulty in dissuading him from following the counsels of General Trépoff. When, at a later period, under particularly trying circumstances, the Emperor yielded to influences which led to his fall and caused the *débâcle* of Russia, I am profoundly convinced that it was because he had no longer at his side a man of the moral strength of M. Stolypine, whose premature death was an irreparable disaster.

Not a little disappointed, but by no means discouraged, at his failure to form a coalition Cabinet, M. Stolypine resolutely set to work to make the best use of the interval of seven months and a half before the meeting



of the second Douma. His programme, which was made public a little later, in the course of the month of September, had a double purpose—on the one hand to maintain, or rather to re-establish by the most vigorous measures, the public order, which was so seriously disturbed in the cities and more still in the country; on the other, to draw up a series of bills to be laid before the Douma. He considered it most important to avoid repeating the error of the preceding Government and letting the new assembly flounder in empty debates and waste its time in sterile declamations. Upon re-entering the Tauride Palace the deputies were to find awaiting their consideration a number of proposed laws, the object of which was to introduce liberal reforms into the most diverse spheres of the national existence. This vast programme embraced the following principal questions: religious liberty, *habeas corpus*, civic equality, State insurance for benefit of the working-classes, reform of the local autonomies or Zemstvos, the creation of Zemstvos in those parts of the Empire where they did not already exist (the north-western and Baltic provinces), the creation of Zemstvos and municipalities in Poland, the transformation of local tribunals, reform of the higher and intermediate schools, a tax on incomes and the reform of the police.

But, outside of this programme, sufficient in itself to occupy the Douma for a long time, there were at that period certain burning questions which demanded immediate solution on the part of the Government if dangerous consequences were to be avoided. For instance, it was necessary to abrogate at once several decrees that were particularly odious in their restriction of religious liberty and their bearing upon the condition of the Jews and Old Believers, but, above all, it was still



the agrarian question that called for prompt measures, as it had by that time reached a most acute stage.

In order to provide for this necessity M. Stolypine decided to resort to Article 78<sup>7</sup> of the constitutional law, which gave the Government, during a suspension of the Douma's labours and in the case of exceptional circumstances requiring legislative measures, the right to take such measures by means of decrees, on condition of submitting them to the Douma within two months after the resumption of work by that assembly.

M. Stolypine has often been blamed for the large use that he made of Article 78<sup>7</sup>, copied from the famous Article 14 of the Austrian Constitution, and I myself grew in time to disapprove of his exaggerated interpretation of that article for the purpose of using it as a weapon against the Douma and especially against the Council of the Empire. In fact, this was one of the causes of our eventual disagreements and our final rupture; but at the critical period of which I am now writing the immediate adjustment of the agrarian question was really a matter that could rightly be construed as belonging to the "exceptional circumstances" provided for in Article 78<sup>7</sup>, for that question not only was the cause of all the disturbances in the country districts, but had become, so to speak, an object for the bids of rival revolutionary parties, who made use of it for the purpose of drawing into their ranks the rural population with promises of solution, more or less radical and Utopian.

In asking me to retain the portfolio of Foreign Affairs in his Cabinet M. Stolypine knew that he could count upon my hearty co-operation in carrying out his programme of reforms and in preparing the ground for future harmony between the Douma and the Govern-

ment. In spite of the considerable work demanded by the affairs of my Department—I had just commenced the laborious negotiations which brought to pass a year later the agreements with England and Japan—I took an active part in the meetings of the Council of Ministers, during which were discussed, several times a week, the different laws in process of formation. Following the inveterate habit of the Russian bureaucracy of working at night—for it is well known that in Russia, as also in Spain, late hours are the fashion—these sessions took place at an advanced hour of the evening and lasted until three or four o'clock in the morning. Moreover, having acquired abroad the habit of early rising, I was accustomed to receive during the forenoon the reports of my different chiefs of service, and consequently I was unable to get more than four or five hours of sleep during that entire period of intense activity. If to all this is added the super-excitement universally prevalent as a result of current events, and, soon after, heightened as it was by an unprecedented series of terrorist attacks, one can easily comprehend the physical effort as well as the nervous tension that my daily tasks incurred. I was sustained, however, in their accomplishment by the passionate interest inspired in me by the great work mapped out by M. Stolypine, whose high aims and absolute devotion to the cause that he served commanded my admiration more and more as the days passed.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TERRORISM

**D**URING the whole period that the first Douma was in session, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party had suspended the series of terrorist attacks against the high dignitaries of the Empire and the agents of the police, which they had carried on without cessation since the beginning of the revolutionary movement. Early in the summer that party had published in the foreign Press an announcement to the effect that, "in view of the deliberations of the Douma and while waiting for the political situation to be clearly understood by the people, it would refrain from terrorist tactics, without, however, ceasing its preparations for the combat; and that the Central Committee of the party would decide at what moment revolutionary activities should be resumed."

The dissolution of the Douma gave the signal for a return to terrorism, and it was decided that it should be inaugurated by a most conspicuous deed of violence. On Saturday, the 25th of August, about three o'clock in the afternoon, a formidable explosion destroyed a part of the villa occupied by M. Stolypine on the Islands. The Prime Minister was not injured, but some thirty people were killed and as many more wounded, several of them seriously, among these two of M. Stolypine's children.

I was in town at the time, receiving at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a visit from M. Nitroff, Master of the Court of the Grand Duke Wladimir, who had requested him to consult me on some matter of the protocol. This business being finished, I detained my visitor, whose artistic taste I knew and appreciated, about a half-hour longer, in order to show him certain interior decorations that were in progress in the palace of the Ministry. After leaving me, M. Nitroff was to go to the residence of the Prime Minister on some other commission entrusted to him by the Grand Duke, and so it happened that this accidental delay saved him from the explosion at M. Stolypine's villa, where he would otherwise have arrived a few minutes before the catastrophe.

Informed by telephone of what had happened, I jumped into my carriage at the door of the Ministry, and in twenty minutes reached the scene of the disaster, the horror of which passes all description. About a third of the villa was blown to pieces, and if the destruction was not more complete it was only because the house had been built of wood ; a stone or brick structure would have been entirely demolished and the number of victims would have been that much more numerous. Partly buried under piles of beams and wreckage one could see human bodies, some inanimate, while others still gave signs of life. Here and there were shreds of clothing and torn and bleeding limbs ; cries of anguish and calls for help wrung the heart ; before the entrance a shapeless mass of wood and twisted iron and the carcasses of two horses were all that was left of the equipage which had brought there the perpetrators of the horrible deed. Literally nothing remained of the vestibule and the three rooms on the ground floor leading to that occupied at the time by M. Stolypine ; as if by a miracle

the effect of the explosion terminated at the very threshold of the Prime Minister's workroom. I found him in a little pavilion in the garden, pale, but quite calm and self-controlled, giving orders in a quiet voice for the succour of the wounded, among whom one of his daughters, a girl of fifteen years, had just been discovered. He himself had rescued his only son, four years of age, from a pile of debris with his own hands. He told me how he had been about to put his foot on the heap of plaster and splinters when he caught sight of a child half buried under it and recognized his son. The little boy was not seriously hurt, but his daughter's condition was very grave; she had been given such first aid as was possible and the arrival of the distinguished surgeon Pavloff, who had been summoned by telephone, was anxiously awaited.

Following is an exact account of what had happened, according to the information I gained at the scene of the catastrophe:

Saturday being M. Stolypine's reception day, there were a good many people waiting to see him in the lower rooms of the villa. With his accustomed courage he had disregarded the warnings that had come to him of an attempt at assassination, and persisted in maintaining the informal and free access of the public to his receptions. All were admitted who had anything to ask of the Minister or any matter to submit to his attention, without presenting any letter of invitation or credentials or even having to identify themselves. A few agents of the secret police were stationed in the first antechamber and scrutinized with experienced eye the visitors as they arrived. In the second antechamber General Zamiatine, a high functionary in the service of the Ministry, assisted by several secretaries, took the

names of the arrivals and questioned them as to their objects before permitting access to the waiting-room that adjoined the Minister's workroom, running at right angles and giving on the garden. On the floor above were the apartments occupied by M. Stolypine's children.

The reception had begun at two o'clock and there were some forty persons in the waiting-room, of all sorts and conditions—high officials, financiers, provincials who had arrived in the capital only the night before, retired employés or widows of employés soliciting pensions or help, and even peasants sent by their communes to lay their needs before the Minister. At half-past two a hired landau brought to the perron of the villa three individuals wearing military uniform. As they were passing through the first antechamber, the police probably noticed something irregular about their dress or conduct, for they stopped them at the door of the second room. The noise of a struggle was heard, followed by a cry "*Vive la Révolution!*" and immediately thereafter by the terrible explosion. All the people in the first antechamber were killed outright, including the three criminals, whose bodies were never identified. In the second, General Zamiatine was grievously wounded and the other officials either killed or wounded. In the waiting-room about a third of the occupants were killed and all the rest wounded. The three rooms were completely destroyed, as well as those overhead, but because of the elasticity of the wooden framework of the house the remainder of the building was left almost intact. The door between the waiting-room and the Minister's cabinet was torn from its hinges and M. Stolypine, who was talking with a visitor, was thrown to the floor, but neither of them suffered harm beyond a few slight bruises.



Among those killed were a former provincial governor, a marshal of the nobility, Colonel Schultz, chief of police of the Tauride Palace, and a few others of high rank, but the majority of the victims were either police agents or humble petitioners, among whom was a poor woman in an advanced state of pregnancy, horribly *éventrée*. The force of the explosion was such that the trees along the bank of the Neva were uprooted and all the window-panes in the houses on the opposite bank were shattered. For hundreds of metres round about were scattered the mangled remains of human limbs and bits of clothing, torn and stained with blood.

M. Stolypine's two children were buried in the débris when the upper story collapsed. His little son escaped with a simple fracture, but his daughter had both feet completely crushed and suffered terribly; after the first examination, most of the doctors who had been called advised immediate amputation, but Dr. Pavloff, the highest authority in surgery, opposed it, and thanks to him Mlle. Stolypine was eventually able to walk, after several years of complicated treatment. For a long time, however, it was feared that she would be, if not mutilated, at least crippled for life.

That same evening M. Stolypine removed with his family to the official residence of the Minister of the Interior, but a few days later, on account of the difficulty of protecting the building against terrorist attacks, he established himself in an apartment of the Winter Palace, which had not been occupied by the Emperor since the beginning of the revolutionary movement.

It was my custom, every Saturday night, to leave town and pass Sunday at Peterhof, where the Court resided at the time and where the Emperor had placed at my disposal an apartment in the Imperial Palace.

But M. Stolypine having asked me to go to his house that evening to take part in an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers, I put off my departure until the following day. I shall have more to say of this meeting, which lasted almost all night and had so great an influence upon the subsequent course of events. On Sunday I arrived at Peterhof, where I was to breakfast with the Emperor ; on leaving the train I perceived a great stir on the station platform, and found that the body of General Minn, who, as commanding officer of the Semenovskiy regiment, had played the principal rôle in the repression of the Moscow revolt, had just been brought to the station. The General was killed by a woman, who fired repeated shots with a revolver and, when arrested upon the spot, warned the police not to jostle her because she was carrying a bomb, to have been used in case General Minn had escaped the revolver. The bomb, which was of the size and shape of a sardine box, was taken from her, placed carefully on a bench and guarded by two policemen. A subsequent examination proved that it contained a very powerful explosive, the discharge of which would have produced terrible havoc.

At breakfast the Emperor showed profound emotion with regard to the attempted assassination of M. Stolypine, and questioned me minutely as to all the details of the catastrophe. He gave evidence of the keenest solicitude for the Minister and his family and bestowed upon them the most touching attentions. Having been a witness of the attitude of Nicholas II. on this occasion and several others of the same nature, I am able to qualify as absolutely false the accusations that have been made against him as being strangely insensible to the sufferings of others.

Beginning with that memorable Saturday, the 25th of August, a series of terrorist attacks continued for several months with hardly a day of interruption, not only at St. Petersburg, but all over Russia. Due to the energetic methods of repression adopted by M. Stolypine they became gradually less frequent. He showed extraordinary bravery and, in spite of the fact that his own life was especially aimed at, he took but little precaution against possible attempts, escaping a succession of plots, one of which was particularly audacious and original. A group of terrorists were arrested by the police at the very moment that they were about to carry it out, their plan being to launch a superb red automobile of German make, loaded with deadly explosives, at full speed against a door of the Winter Palace leading to the apartments of the Prime Minister. If this plot had not been discovered in time the destruction would have been formidable.

In order to give some idea of the excessive nerve of M. Stolypine I will mention here an episode which did not take place until three years later, but which is very characteristic of the entire period. He was present, together with several members of his Cabinet, at one of the first aviation trials in Russia, made by a group of pilots just returned from France, where they had learned to fly. One of the aviators begged M. Stolypine to go up with him and his comrades joined enthusiastically in the request, declaring that they would all feel greatly encouraged by such a proof of confidence in their skill. M. Stolypine, without a moment's hesitation, accepted the invitation of the pilot, an officer by the name of Matzievski, and accompanied him in a flight which lasted for about half an hour. When he landed he found all the police in a state of tremendous excite-

ment, and with good reason, for information had been received a few days before to the effect that Lieutenant Matzievski belonged to one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations. M. Stolypine had cognizance of that information before going to the aerodrome, and when he consented to ascend with Matzievski he knew perfectly well to what a strange companion he was entrusting his life. On leaving the field he congratulated his pilot warmly and expressed himself as delighted with the experience. Shortly after, this incident had an unexpected epilogue. In the course of a flight Lieutenant Matzievski fell from a great height and was instantly killed. The cause of the accident was inexplicable, for the pilot had been seen to fall separately from the machine, which showed no trace of having sustained any damage before crashing to the ground. This led to the firm conviction on the part of the police that Matzievski had committed suicide, and that this fate had been imposed by the terrorist committee as a punishment for having let the chance escape of doing away with M. Stolypine.

All these details, incredible as they may appear, were fully confirmed to me by M. Stolypine himself. When I asked him why he had risked his life without necessity and with full knowledge of the danger incurred, he replied, after thinking a moment :

“ I am inclined to believe that it was an instinctive act on my part, but I recollect also having said to myself that they must on no account be allowed to think I am afraid of them. Besides,” he added, “ before I took my seat in the machine I looked squarely in the eyes of Lieutenant Matzievski, and saw plainly that he would not dare. In fact, it is quite possible that it was the spirit of the sportsman, in love with his art, that prevailed

over him at that moment, rather than that of the terrorist."

It was not until the 14th of September, 1911, after escaping a series of attempts upon his life, that M. Stolypine finally met his death at Kieff, having received several pistol shots during a theatrical representation at which the Emperor and all the Imperial Court were present. It is curious that, while confronting peril with the utmost courage, and even braving it needlessly at times, he always had a presentiment that he would die a violent death. He spoke of this to me several times and with entire conviction, but at the same time with perfect calmness. I remember that I listened to him with all the more incredulity because, in spite of the warnings that reached me from time to time of an attempt upon my own life in the near future, I felt an absolute instinctive certainty that I should suffer no harm.

Every one of the Ministers was individually condemned to death by decision of the central terrorist committee. Sometimes the police had, or pretended to have, precise information as to the person charged with the assassination of this or that Minister. For instance, according to their discoveries, I was to perish at the hands of a woman known among the terrorists under the name of "the Princess," who was described to me as of Oriental type, very dark and distinguished by remarkable beauty. As a matter of fact I was never favoured with even a glimpse of any person answering to this description, and I gave but little thought to this detective story. The "Princess," if she had existed, would have had no trouble to speak of in carrying out her plan, for I did not place much reliance upon the measures of precaution offered by the police service and preferred to trust to my star. Nevertheless, as the



assassinations became more and more frequent, and it was necessary to provide for the worst, I took pains to arrange so that the affairs of my Department need not suffer any interruption in case of my disappearance ; a sealed envelope, lying upon my desk, contained all the necessary instructions to enable my eventual successor to enter upon his duties without delay. This precaution turned out to be quite superfluous ; in spite of the sinister predictions of the secret police, I was never personally an object of terrorist attack. I came very near, however, being the victim of a plot against the Grand Duke Nicholas, afterwards commander in chief of the Russian armies in 1914. It was on my return from Tzarskoie-Selo, the winter residence of the Court, where I had been to make my weekly report to the Emperor. The Grand Duke Nicholas had also gone there that same day, and instead of returning to St. Petersburg in his special train he stayed to dinner with the Emperor. So it happened that I took his place in the empty train, and just before it arrived at St. Petersburg station the engine driver noticed a person putting something on the track and then running away. He brought the train to a sudden stop, only a few turns of the wheels from an infernal machine, the explosion of which would have destroyed, not only the train, but a good part of the railway station. This incident confirmed me in my fatalism, and I have never regretted refusing to be bothered with the protection of a police service which M. Stolypine never succeeded in completely reforming and whose agents, as was proved by M. Bourtzeff's revelations of the double rôle played by the notorious Azeff, were sometimes no less dangerous than the avowed terrorists. The murder of M. Stolypine appears to have been committed by one of those agents, who served and



betrayed in turn, and even simultaneously, both the police and the revolutionaries.

The terrorists attacked not only the high dignitaries of the Empire, such as Ministers, Governors, Generals, Governors of Provinces, etc., but functionaries of all ranks, and particularly the agents of the police, who were literally tracked in the streets, and perished in ever increasing numbers. Besides the attacks upon individuals there were many others against the banks, churches and public depositories. These were dignified by the name of "expropriations" and yielded considerable sums to the terrorists, as, for example, the robbery in broad daylight in the streets of St. Petersburg of six hundred thousand roubles which were being transferred from the customs house to the State bank, under guard of eight mounted Cossacks and several agents of the police.

The list of the higher functionaries alone who met death at the hands of the terrorists during this period is too long to be related. The murder of General Minn was quickly followed by those of General Count Ignatieff, General Kozloff, General von der Launitz. Prefect of St. Petersburg, the Governors of Warsaw, Samara, Penza, the Commandant of the Black Sea Fleet, etc.

The terrorists carried out their plans with the utmost audacity, and contemplated willingly the sacrifice of their own lives when that was necessary to ensure success. For instance, a woman, who was arrested in the street, where she was waiting to kill the Grand Duke Nicholas, wore a sort of jacket containing a considerable quantity of dynamite, which she intended, but lacked the time, to explode in case the Grand Duke escaped the shots from her revolver. I was a witness of two assassinations and was able to judge of the *sang-froid* that charac-

terized the terrorists' operations. General Kozloff was killed in the most frequented part of the Peterhof park, a few steps from the wing of the old Palace, where I had an apartment, and I saw the murder from my window. The poor General, who was a most retiring and harmless person, had the misfortune to resemble in appearance General Trépoff, whom the assassin really aimed to destroy. General von der Launitz, prefect of the capital, fell at my very side, after receiving a number of shots, as we came away from the inaugural ceremony at the Pasteur Institute in St. Petersburg.

The Council of Ministers, held in the evening of August 25th, after the explosion, at the town residence of the Prime Minister, was of great moment. M. Stolypine opened it with an address, in which he began by declaring in the most energetic manner that the attack upon him, which had barely missed depriving him of his children, could not influence in the slightest degree his political course; his programme remained unchanged: pitiless repression of all disorders and all revolutionary or terrorist acts; carrying into effect, with the help of the next Douma, a far-reaching plan of reforms in the direction of liberalism; immediate solution of the most urgent problems by executive decrees and, first of all, a settlement of the agrarian question. M. Stolypine added that we must expect the reactionary party to profit by the occasion and make it a pretext for inciting the Emperor to proclaim a military dictatorship, and even to annul the charter of 1905 and return to the old régime of absolute power. He announced that he would oppose with all his strength any such reaction and, rather than abandon his constitutional course, he would resign his office. He ended by expressing the hope that his colleagues would

support him whole-heartedly in his efforts to hold the Emperor to his word.

While M. Stolypine was speaking there was a hurrying to and fro of doctors and nurses in the halls and adjoining rooms, and now and then the stifled cries of the children could be heard through the doors and partitions as their wounds were being bandaged. Nevertheless M. Stolypine continued his address without displaying the least emotion, thereby creating a profound impression upon his hearers.

In spite of the initial changes that M. Stolypine had made in the Cabinet, it was still far from being homogeneous in its character. There were avowed reactionaries among us, such as M. Schwanebach, Comptroller of the Empire; others, like M. Scheglovitoff, Minister of Justice, concealed cleverly enough their leanings toward the extreme Right until later, when it became evident that their views would please the power above. But such was the strength of M. Stolypine's eloquence that the Council approved his words unanimously and promised to support him before the Emperor.

It was not long before M. Stolypine's fears were realized. During the period immediately following the explosion of the 25th August there arose a veritable mutiny against the Prime Minister in the reactionary camp and the inner circle of the Court. His immediate replacement by a military dictatorship was insisted upon, and the hope was openly expressed that this would be only the first step to a restoration of absolutism. In short, the situation recalled that following the assassination of the Duc de Berri, on the 13th of February, 1820, which gave the Duke and Duchess d'Angoulême and the "ultra" party a pretext for a violent campaign against the Duc Decazes, whose object was to "reconcile

France with the Bourbon monarchy" by means of a moderate liberal policy. But whereas Louis XVIII., despite his tender attachment for the Duc Decazes, ended by sacrificing his favourite to the reactionary movement which he inwardly disapproved, Nicholas II., on the contrary, had the merit to yield to M. Stolypine and permit him to carry out his programme, although his secret sympathies were with the extreme Right.

The struggle between M. Stolypine and his adversaries was a very bitter one. The reactionaries, abandoning their efforts to accomplish the fall of the Premier, called loudly for the adoption of violent measures against the terrorists. Asserting the inefficacy and delay in the regular course of justice, they insisted that the police should be invested with power to execute the criminals without trial and on mere accusation. M. Stolypine protested vigorously against such a procedure, the effect of which would have been to create a state of complete anarchy in the Empire. He was even obliged to defend his position against certain members of his Cabinet, notably Messrs. Schwanebach and Scheglovitoff, who were backed by the Ministers of War and the Marine. At the same time the terrorist attacks grew more and more serious and demanded exceptional measures of repression, and, by way of compromise, M. Stolypine had the Emperor sign a decree instituting councils of war to take cognizance of grave crimes committed in such regions as were under martial law, including at that period the capital and the greater part of the provinces of the Empire. M. Stolypine has been severely criticized for having established these tribunals, copied after the Austrian *Feldkriegsgerichte*, but it must be remembered that he was forced to meet exceptional difficulties. Pressure had been brought upon him to do away with

all legal procedure and to delegate to the police a sort of lynch power. While the justice exercised by the new tribunals was evidently of a summary character, it was nevertheless justice, and, by instituting these courts, he cut short the efforts of the reactionary party to oppose the red terror by a white terror.

It was during the excitement caused by these events, and in an atmosphere surcharged with the heat of party strife, that M. Stolypine had to formulate the reforms which he had undertaken to submit to the Douma within six months. The Cabinet had just been completed by the appointment, as Minister of Commerce, of M. Filosofoff, an enlightened man of liberal views; but, due to its heterogeneous make-up, M. Stolypine was obliged to superintend and direct the preparation of the different bills. As for the agrarian question, the most important of all, he took upon himself the task of studying it in all its details, and the series of ukases by which it was regulated may be considered as his own personal achievement.

As I was the only member of the Cabinet who possessed any intimate knowledge of the working of a constitutional and parliamentary régime, I was called upon to decide all questions arising from the need of adapting the new legislation to the conditions created by the charter of 1905. While I accepted willingly this extra labour, that which occupied me particularly, in addition to my regular duties, was the agrarian question, in which I had always been intensely interested. On this subject I had long and frequent consultations with M. Stolypine, during which I championed the system of small private ownership.

I have told elsewhere how, thanks to my study of the social and economical life of Western Europe, I had



long ago given up the Slavophile doctrines, and among them the harmful theory of the *Mir*. It was with especial satisfaction that I saw M. Stolypine, despite his belief in many of the Slavophile doctrines, grow more and more in favour of the suppression of communal property and the establishment of small individual ownership among the peasants. In order to convince him the more, I furnished him with interesting data relating to the history of agrarian reform in Europe, which I had collected in different countries, especially in Denmark during my stay there, when I had made a series of reports to the Government on the same subject. The transition from communal to private landholding in Denmark took place more recently than in other parts of Europe, that is to say, at the close of the eighteenth century, and was effected under the Ministry of Count Bernstorff, who began by applying the reform to the domains of the Crown and his own estates. While studying the documents preserved at Copenhagen, I had noticed the similarity of the agrarian conditions, as they existed in Denmark before the reform, to those which still prevailed in Russia, and I was particularly impressed by the beneficent results obtained in an extraordinarily short period by Count Bernstorff's reforms. I had a number of these documents copied and photographs made of the plans showing the parcelling and distribution of the old communal properties among the peasants. These data interested M. Stolypine in the highest degree, and I like to think that they played no small part in crystallizing his own projects for agrarian reforms.

By conferring upon the Russian peasant the right of individual ownership of land, M. Stolypine created at the same time a new personal status for the peasant.



Up to that time the rural classes enjoyed only limited civic rights and were subject to the burdensome authority of the communes. The new legislation was a veritable act of enfranchisement, abolishing the special courts and tribunals which hitherto had had jurisdiction over the peasant, freeing him from collective responsibility for the payment of taxes and permitting him to mortgage his piece of land, to establish industrial enterprises and to take part as a landholder in the elections and assemblies of the Zemstvos. In short, the peasants were no longer a class apart in the State, and became for the first time Russian citizens in fact.

But while M. Stolypine conferred upon the peasants the right of owning land individually, he absolutely refused to attack the rights of the large and intermediate landholders, and he rejected the principle of forced expropriation in favour of which the Douma had voted, under the influence of the Cadets and revolutionaries. His prevailing idea was to develop in the mind of the peasant a respect for property which neither serfdom, nor the distribution of land in 1861, nor the régime of the *Mir* had been able to inculcate. It is true that, in 1861, the peasants had redeemed the lands which fell to their lot, but the payment, being in the form of annual instalments, was hardly to be distinguished from a real estate tax. Consequently, the fact of having bought the land which he owned was completely forgotten by the peasant, and he listened all the more willingly to the agitators who explained to him that he ought to receive free of charge the land that remained in the possession of his former master.

From an economic point of view, the preservation of the land belonging to the larger landholders was considered by M. Stolypine to be an essential condition

for the development of agriculture and an increase of production. A distribution of these holdings among the peasants, even if it were complete, could not have brought any real relief, because the total number of great and intermediate landholders in Russia hardly exceeded 130,000, and their acreage only amounted to 165 millions, against some 400 million acres belonging to the peasants. Divided among the peasants this would have meant but an insignificant addition to the holding of each individual. Furthermore, the great and intermediate properties were the centres of cultivation and agricultural progress, and their disappearance could not but have an unfavourable effect on the yield of the soil. It was evident that a just combination of large, intermediate and small holdings, after the fashion of France and England, would bring about the best results.

In order to provide for the real need of the peasants, M. Stolypine had in view, on the one hand, the acquisition by purchase of the land belonging to the Crown and the private holdings of the Imperial family with the aid of the "Peasants' Bank"; and, on the other, the development of emigration to the fertile regions of Siberia by granting to the colonists the "cabinet" lands which were the personal property of the Emperor. As an initial measure two ukases were issued offering for sale in small lots about ten million hectares belonging to the first two categories.

These and other measures constituting M. Stolypine's agrarian reforms were embodied in a series of ukases of which the principal one, which liberated the peasants from the domination of the *Mir*, bore the date of November 25th, 1906. Being decreed under the famous Article 87, it was necessary that they be submitted to the Douma within three months after its convocation

so as to conform to the Constitution. As the second Douma had only an ephemeral existence it was to the third Douma that the task fell of formulating the decrees into a definite law.

The agrarian reforms were adopted by the lower House with scarcely any modification and by a heavy majority, but in the Council of the Empire they met with a lively opposition and were passed by a majority of one vote, counting those of the Ministers who were members of that assembly. My brother and I had been appointed members of the Council by the Emperor only a few weeks before, and it was due to our two votes in favour of the Government's plan that M. Stolypine's agrarian reform escaped a check that would have seriously complicated the situation.

Curiously enough, this reform was opposed simultaneously by the two extremes, both Right and Left. The Socialists rejected it because of their communistic theories, and as for the reactionaries, they regarded it as an attack upon the sacrosanct traditions of the past and a step in the direction of the equalization of the classes—a strange aberration on the part of a party calling itself Conservative, but at the same time joining hands with the revolutionaries to defeat a law which had for its object the strengthening of the principle of ownership of property.

It was the reactionary party that had organized the opposition to agrarian reform in the Council of the Empire. When the law came up for discussion that party was particularly strong because the Emperor had limited his appointments to persons who were well known for their reactionary tendencies. My appointment, as well as my brother's, had been refused several times by the Emperor, and it was only due to

M. Stolypine's insistence that we were finally admitted.

M. Stolypine's agrarian reforms met with extraordinary success, surpassing the most optimistic expectations. The Russian peasant, prone as he is to listen to revolutionary propaganda when it appeals to his dominant passion for more land, is nevertheless possessed of a keen intelligence. He was not slow in going ahead of the measures decreed for facilitating the ownership of the land which he farmed and finding means for acquiring additional land by proper and legal methods. Under the able and firm direction of M. Krivocheine, who succeeded Prince Wassiltchikoff as Minister of Agriculture, the new legislation, reinforced by a considerable extension of the activity and power of the "Peasants' Bank," produced wide-spread results in a surprisingly short time. These results were so satisfactory that, on the eve of the revolution of 1917, it is safe to say that the entire agrarian problem was in a way to be definitely solved, and that only a comparatively short period would have sufficed to put the agrarian régime in Russia on a solid foundation. The social and economic upheaval caused by the revolution destroyed, alas, those magnificent results, and no one can foresee when or how Russia will recover from the blow she has received.

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Towards the middle of September, M. Stolypine furnished to the newspapers a long and vigorously worded statement of his political programme, in which he announced the intention of the Government to repress the acts of the terrorists in the most energetic manner, and to maintain order in the country at any

cost. He declared that the plans of the Government were not to be modified in the least by the aggression of criminals. This or that person could be killed, he said, but it was impossible to kill the idea which inspired the Government. "The crimes of the terrorists make the final object more difficult to attain, but they are only occasional. The Government will oppose force to violence, but it cannot hold back all reforms and suspend the life of the nation merely for the sake of giving attention to the suppression of the revolution. The Government has to deal with a number of measures, some of which are to be referred to the Douma and the Council of the Empire, while others, particularly urgent, like the agrarian question and that of the religious restrictions, will be regulated immediately." The projects of laws that were to be submitted to the Douma were then enumerated, and in conclusion the people of liberal views, who desired the tranquillity of the State and its freedom from peril, were urged to support the Government.

M. Stolypine's appeal to the country, although scorned by the revolutionary and extreme liberal parties, produced an excellent impression upon the public in general. Some weeks later the first anniversary of the constitutional charter of 1905 was to occur, and the alarmists predicted disorders and hostile demonstrations against the Government for that date. But nothing of the kind materialized. The terrorists, it is true, continued their operations, but these, to use the words of M. Stolypine, were only "occasional acts," and it began to look as if the whole country desired order and tranquillity and had confidence in the energy as well as the sincerity of the Government.

Abroad, and especially in France and England, public



opinion had criticized severely the dissolution of the Douma and had shown little confidence in M. Stolypine's projects at the start. It was all the more encouraging to note that the European Press now began to do justice to his efforts. An example of this change of view was shown by the following extract from the *Journal des Débats* of a date early in November :

“ For the first time since the beginning of the Russian crisis there appears to be a Government that knows what it wants to do and does it forthwith. M. Stolypine has proclaimed that he would enforce order and effect reforms, and he has proceeded to carry out simultaneously these two main points of his programme. It is true that he has used harsh measures, condemned by sensitive souls, too much inclined to share Rousseau's illusions regarding the superior nature of man. We have never sympathized with the indignation inspired by their optimism. It has always seemed to us that if the Government, sole maintainer of order in a country so imaginative, so Utopian, so deficient in elementary political education and with no knowledge of the rudimentary structure of public life, were overthrown, Russia would fall into anarchy far more cruel in its results than the repression designed to avoid it. We do not mention the danger that would menace the national existence of Russia in such a crisis ; there are people of superior mind for whom so abstract a consideration is a negligible quantity. M. Stolypine's Government has repressed disorder, as it was obliged to. At times, unfortunately, too much severity has been employed, as our St. Petersburg correspondent has stated. But at such times a Government can hardly be expected to be an instrument of precision, capable of adjusting its acts in exact propor-



tion to the result necessary to produce. It is to be hoped that, with the progress of order and the stability of the Government, the necessary coercion may be kept within reasonable and useful limits. But it must be admitted that M. Stolypine has done much for the pacification of Russia, and has proved by his acts as well as by words that mere repression was not his aim. He has accompanied it with reforms of the greatest importance. He has provided for the peasants a vast extent of land, with liberal terms and facilities for payment. He has liberated the Jews from the heaviest of the legal burdens and persecutions under which they formerly struggled. He has given the benefits of the common law to millions of Old Believers, who were subject to an intolerable restriction of privileges. These reforms have convinced the public of the sincerity of this firm man, who dealt harshly with anarchists of all sorts, but kept his promises at the same time. His repeated declarations that the elections would take place and that the Douma would be convened have inspired confidence, little by little. It is no longer feared that the obstruction of the Minister will nullify the good-will and the promises of the Czar."

I have cited the opinion of a great French journal which is particularly competent to judge of foreign political matters, to substantiate my own testimony in favour of the results obtained by M. Stolypine during the first few months following his appointment as Premier. Most of the other French newspapers, as well as the English Press, were equally appreciative of his efforts, and for the first time since the commencement of the revolutionary movement the situation in Russia appeared to inspire confidence all over Europe.

I decided to profit by these circumstances and visit France. It was the custom for a newly-appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, whether Russian or French, to take the first opportunity that offered to visit the capital of the allied country in order to get in touch with the men in power. Accordingly, I obtained the Emperor's permission to go to Paris, where I was to be received by the President of the Republic, and to confer with the members of M. Sarrien's Cabinet, in which M. Bourgeois was Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Clemenceau Minister of the Interior, and M. Briand Minister of Public Worship. To avoid passing through Berlin I planned to go by way of Bavaria, where my family, whom I had not seen for five months, was spending the summer at Lake Tegernsee. My wife was to go with me from there to Paris, but, on my return, in accordance with established custom, it would be necessary to stop at Berlin, where I was to be received by Emperor William and to see the Chancellor, Prince von Bülow.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EMPEROR NICHOLAS II

IT is in the place to which I have retired for the writing of these memoirs, and at the very moment chosen for undertaking the difficult and delicate task of defining the characteristic traits of the Emperor Nicholas II., that news has just come to me of the death of the unfortunate Sovereign, foully murdered in a remote corner of Russia, separated from the wife and children whom he so tenderly loved, and worn to a shadow of his former self, it is said, by more than a year of physical and moral suffering and privation. The first effect of this terrible shock was to impel me to drop my pen and abandon the attempt. Could I pronounce judgment upon Nicholas II. so soon after his death, and, while essaying to defend his memory from calumny—a task impossible of accomplishment unless the whole truth be told—fall into the danger of wounding the loving hearts that, as I sincerely hope, have not ceased to beat and endure their grief, in spite of sinister rumours that his family shared his tragic fate?

I cannot, however, desist from this undertaking for the following reasons: The world, shocked as it has been by so many tragic events during the last four years, received the news of the Emperor's assassination with a sort of indifference. Most of the newspapers in the

countries of the Entente printed the shortest of obituaries and gave the impression that their writers refrained, for motives of delicacy, from expressing their real thoughts. One could not help feeling that this reserve veiled an overwhelming condemnation of the character and acts of the late Sovereign. There was one glaring exception to this "conspiracy of silence"—the London *Daily Telegraph* published a series of articles, signed by Dr. Dillon, which not only embodied a violent accusation against Nicholas II. on the score of his faults as a ruler, but also attributed to him certain traits that were unsympathetic, if not actually repugnant. In view of Dr. Dillon's acknowledged talent as a writer and his reputation as an authority on all matters pertaining to Russia I could not help fearing that his statements would confirm a public opinion, already contaminated by irresponsible tales from the pens of other and less respected writers, for, since the fall of the Russian monarchy, there have appeared a series of books whose authors—to name only M. Rivet (in "The Last Romanoff") and M. Bienstock (in "Raspoutine, La Fin d'un Régime")—devoted themselves to the cheap task of piecing together without the slightest critical examination any and all rumours and stories that they could pick up which were of a nature to blacken the Emperor's memory.

Confronted with such misleading and untruthful statements it has seemed to me to be my plain duty to contribute a testimony based upon personal observation and acquaintance. This testimony will, I hope, be all the more valuable because at no moment during my collaboration with Nicholas II. have I been blind to the mistakes of his public life, and because I am conscious of having made every effort to dissuade him from a course which could not but lead him to ruin and at

the same time bring Russia to destruction. Rather than conform to his ideas I chose, when it became necessary, to resign my post, and no one has been, or still is, more severe upon Nicholas II. in regard to his shortcomings as Sovereign and master of the destinies of his people than I. Nevertheless, I feel it to be all the more incumbent upon me to proclaim that, as a man, he inspired, by a union of rare qualities of heart and charming traits of character, a sentiment of deep sympathy, which I felt in common with all who knew him intimately. Even after parting from him politically I have never ceased to cherish the most profound and faithful attachment for his person, and his tragic end has been one of the greatest sorrows of my life.

As a general rule it is necessary to have lived in close proximity to a Sovereign and to have breathed the air of a court in order to pass judgment upon certain psychological phenomena which proceed from a peculiar environment and special conditions not found elsewhere. If it is true that a Sovereign sees men and things through a false atmosphere, which often transforms them and obscures his vision, it is equally true that he himself is rarely revealed as he is, and so becomes, as it were, a legendary person, known to the world only as described by writers who have lacked opportunity to know him thoroughly. The error common to authors of books of the sort I have just mentioned consists in a belief that it is possible to judge of so complex and vague a character as that of Nicholas II. by the mere reading of documents and by hearsay. A nice appreciation of his personality is the more difficult, hedged as it is within a restricted circle and, therefore, known veritably to a very limited group of people.

It is a curious fact that the usual descriptions of the

Emperor's physique have been misleading. His smallness of stature has been exaggerated and he has been represented as of quite insignificant appearance. When he was seen amidst the members of the Imperial family, all of high stature, it is true that he looked small in comparison with the others. Neither did he resemble his uncles and cousins in his features, which he inherited from the Danish princess, his mother. In fact, he was the only one of the Imperial family who showed none of the distinctive traits of the Romanoffs.\*

The high stature and remarkable beauty of almost all the members of the Imperial family came from the wife of Paul I., a princess of Würtemberg-Monbéliard. (Paul I. himself was so conspicuously ugly that, when he arrived in Paris in 1782, under the name of the Comte du Nord, the French populace did not refrain from unfavourable comment during his passage through the streets.) These distinctive physical traits reached their perfection in the person of the Emperor Nicholas I., who, according to a contemporary record, resembled a Greek hero in his youth. For three generations this physical excellence endured; the Emperor Alexander III., father of Nicholas II., although not fine of feature, was a man of Herculean strength and majestic presence.

When the Emperor Nicholas II. came to the throne he gave the impression of belonging to a race entirely

\* It must be remembered that the present Russian Imperial family is descended from the Romanoffs only through the female line. After the death of the Empress Elizabeth the throne of Russia fell to a Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, whose mother was a daughter of Peter the Great. He, under the name of Peter III., became the progenitor of the Russian Imperial line. If it is true, however, that the birth of Paul I., successor of Peter III., was irregular and that his real father was a gentleman of the Court, named Soltykoff, then the members of the Imperial family have not a drop of Romanoff blood in their veins. The memoirs of Peter III. and the mother of Paul I., the authenticity of which is generally conceded, appear to confirm this version.



different from that of his predecessors. He had none of the outward physical gifts that impress the crowd, and it was only upon a nearer view that he was seen to be, if not tall, at least well set up, graceful in his movements, and much stronger than he appeared to be from a distance.

Those who were least partial to Nicholas II. never denied his charm, the perfect simplicity in his bearing and the sweet expression of his eyes, which were compared to those of a gazelle. Personally, I confess to have fallen under the spell of his attractive nature, and never more so than when I saw him together with the Kaiser, whose loud exuberance and theatrical bearing were in direct contrast with the simple and unaffected behaviour of Nicholas II. But these very characteristics, graceful and lovable as they were, could not shed their light beyond the small circle which surrounded him and, by their intimate nature, could not bring him the widespread popularity enjoyed by the German Sovereign—a popularity, it must be admitted, that Nicholas never prized nor sought.

Was the Emperor naturally gifted and intelligent? I do not hesitate for a moment to affirm that he was. I was often struck by the ease with which he seized every *nuance* of an argument submitted to him and by the clearness in which he expressed his own ideas. I found him always receptive to reasoning or to a logical demonstration. If he followed afterwards an opposite course it was not because he had failed to comprehend or see clearly, but because, meanwhile, he had fallen under the influence of a will stronger than his own. Furthermore, he possessed in a high degree a gift which presupposes intelligence—the gift of tact, which has been well defined as the “intelligence of the heart.”

But, unhappily, his natural intelligence was counter-acted by a lack of higher education and intellectual culture. To this day I have been quite unable to understand how a prince, destined from his cradle to govern one of the greatest empires of the world, could have been left without any serious preparation for the overwhelming task that lay before him. The education of Nicholas II. was really that of a lieutenant of cavalry in one of the regiments of the Imperial Guard, whose officers belonged to the *jeunesse dorée* and paid more attention to sport and social accomplishments than to any special studies, even those useful for a soldier's career.

While the Emperor Nicholas I., an admirer of Prussian militarism, had nevertheless had the good judgment to confide the education of his eldest son to one of the most eminent men of his time, the poet Joukowski, a friend of Poushkin and his *pléiade* of writers, whose works still rank high in Russian literature—the Emperor Alexander III. chose as preceptor for the young heir to the crown an obscure general by the name of Danilowitch, who does not appear to have possessed any qualifications for such important and delicate duties unless his ultra-conservative views may be so considered. However that may be, he turned out to be a preceptor in name only, and had no real influence upon his pupil's course of studies, leaving him apparently to his own devices, except for such teaching as he received from an Englishman, Mr. Heath, who was engaged as a private tutor in the imperial family and who took a real interest in the education of Nicholas II.

It chanced that I knew Mr. Heath very well, and I can even consider myself as having been his pupil in almost the same sense as the Emperor. In fact, this rarely gifted and charming man had been a teacher in the Imperial Lyceum at the time that I was a student

there. Although he was very strict, he was adored by the young men under his charge, and he sought in every way to inculcate high sentiments of honour and duty. He was possessed of a fairly good education and some talent ; among other accomplishments he painted well in water colours. But he excelled particularly in outdoor sports, and took great pains to give his pupils a taste for these and all sorts of athletics. It was to him that Nicholas II. owed his perfect knowledge of English and his skill in all sorts of sport, but it is easy to understand that Mr. Heath, who hardly spoke a word of Russian, and had not the advantage of a university education, was unable to impart the necessary knowledge to prepare his pupil for his rôle as the future Sovereign of Russia.

I have often had occasion to talk about his Imperial pupil with Mr. Heath, who remained in Russia for quite a long time after finishing his duties at the Court. He spoke of Nicholas II. always in terms of the warmest affection, even with tenderness, praising above all his great simplicity and the delicacy of his sentiments. As Mr. Heath had nothing of the courtier in his character, and was distinctly plain-spoken and frank almost to the verge of rudeness, the sincerity of his praise cannot be doubted. When I, in my turn, came in contact with Nicholas II. I was able to verify all that he had said of the Emperor to the last details and to appreciate his powers of observation. The Emperor, on his part, always retained a real attachment for his former teacher, and often spoke of him to me. As he knew that I had been one of Mr. Heath's favourite pupils at the Lyceum, and that I had the most grateful memories of him, it may be that the affection which we shared in common for that excellent man contributed to the establishment

of a friendly understanding between us at the outset of my relations with the Czar.

In order to appreciate fully certain phases of the character and mentality of Nicholas II. one must first take account of the environment in which he passed his childhood and youth until the day when, at the age of twenty-six years, he came to the throne after his father's sudden death. This *milieu* was entirely dominated by the powerful personality of the Emperor Alexander III., whose strong will absolutely controlled all persons who were brought in contact with him.

The superabundant health and strength of Alexander III. seemed to exclude all possibility of an imminent change of reign. As we have seen, the young heir to the throne received no instruction to fit him for his duties as Sovereign; he was not allowed to take any part in the affairs of State; being naturally timid and reserved and extremely juvenile in appearance, he continued to be treated by his parents as a little boy even after outgrowing his youth. He was never really the Czarewitch but remained, in the eyes of his family and intimates, to the very day of his father's death, merely "Nicky," a charming and gentle young man, loving sport and literature (he had an extraordinary memory for verse), but completely a stranger to the political life of his country.

The only occasion on which the heir apparent had to show himself in an independent rôle was his journey to the Far East in 1890-91. This journey, if it had been properly organized, would certainly have aided in developing the natural intelligence of Nicholas II., and enabled him to acquire some ideas which he lacked. Unfortunately, instead of sending men of special experience and knowledge with him, his suite was made up of

young and brilliant officers of the Guards, and headed by General Bariatinsky, a gentleman of the Court, very polished and agreeable, but absolutely lacking in the necessary qualities and education for conducting a journey of that nature. The Court of London displayed much better judgment, and attached to the heir to the Russian throne, during his stay in India, a man particularly competent—Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, of whom I spoke in a preceding chapter. He was thoroughly appreciated by the Czarewitch, who asked nothing better than to learn all that he could from his travels.

It will be remembered that Nicholas II., pursued as he was throughout his tragic career by a sort of fatality, was the victim of an attack by a Japanese fanatic during his stay in Japan. The would-be assassin struck at his head with a sword, but the blow was parried in part by the walking-stick of his cousin, Prince George of Greece, who rushed to his help. The wound was quite deep, but not really serious. It has been asserted that the intellectual faculties of Nicholas II. were weakened by the blow, but, as a matter of fact, there is no ground whatever for such a statement. On the contrary, I was told by the Emperor himself that, after that incident, he had never again been troubled by the frequent headaches from which he had suffered since his childhood.

But, if the attempt upon his life at Kioto did no physical harm, I believe that it gave rise to a feeling of antipathy, and even hatred, to Japan on the part of Nicholas II., and this may not have been without influence upon his Far Eastern policy, which had as its epilogue the Russo-Japanese war.

Brought up, as he was, in an atmosphere of self-effacement and passive obedience, Nicholas II. rendered



to the memory of his father an almost superstitious reverence. The Emperor Alexander III., as we know, personified the idea of absolute monarchical power, and governed Russia with an iron hand for thirteen years, carrying out a rigorous system of conservatism and bureaucratic centralization. This system became the dogma of the men who had been the counsellors of Alexander III., and who retained their places at the beginning of the new reign. They did all in their power to preserve the young Emperor's respect for what they were pleased to call "the traditions bequeathed by the Czar Pacificator." Any tendency on the part of Nicholas II. to free himself from these traditions was quickly stifled by his advisers, and one may say, almost without metaphor, that, during the first years of the new reign, the Russian Empire continued to be governed by the shade of the dead Emperor. Alas, I do not exaggerate when I add that, when the counsellors of Alexander III. had yielded their places to men chosen by Nicholas II. himself, the Empire was not governed at all, or else was misgoverned in the stupid manner that I have already described.

The reverence of the Emperor Nicholas for the memory of his father manifested itself occasionally in strange ways. For instance, he, the supreme chief of the Russian army, never consented to assume a higher rank in the army than that of colonel, to which he had attained under the preceding reign. This touching but somewhat puerile act of filial piety did not help his prestige in military circles, where he came to be referred to always as "the Colonel," a sobriquet which in the end savoured of mockery and a certain disdain.

This same cult for the traditions of the foregoing reign may be held responsible, in a way, for a political error



which led to the most serious consequences for Russia's future and the destiny of Nicholas II. himself.

The death of the Emperor Alexander III., having taken place sooner than could have been expected, revived the hopes of the great Liberal Party that had been held in check during his thirteen years' reign. The leaders of this party, banished from the Court and from all bureaucratic employments, had taken refuge and found a field of activity in the provincial Zemstvos. In these circles it was thought that the young Emperor, whose intelligence and gentle disposition were recognized, might well do as so many other monarchs had done, in Russia as well as in other countries, and adopt a line of conduct entirely different from that of his predecessor. The possibility presented itself of making known to the young Sovereign the liberal aspirations which, it may be safely said, were those of the great majority of clear-thinking Russians. With this object in view it was decided to take advantage of an audience that the Emperor was to grant to the representatives of the Zemstvos, who were deputed to present the congratulations and good wishes of those assemblies a few days after his accession to the throne.

The petition for a constitutional government, more or less clearly expressed in the addresses of almost all the Zemstvos, was rather more definitely formulated in that of the Zemstvo of the province of Tver, which was well known for its liberal tendencies, and therefore very unfavourably regarded at Court. It was in response to this last address that Nicholas II. pronounced those unfortunate words, qualifying the aspirations of the Zemstvos, presented however moderately or respectfully, as "insensate dreams," and declared his firm intention

of maintaining intact the absolute power that he had inherited from his father.

Here is the way in which one of the authors cited above has recounted the scene which occurred at the Winter Palace on the day when the representatives of the Zemstvos called to present their homage to the Emperor Nicholas :

“ The autocrat strutted pompously into the brilliantly lighted hall, and with knitted brows and tightly drawn lips turned wrathfully upon the chosen men of the nation, and, stamping his little foot, ordered them to put away such chimerical notions, which he would never entertain.”

I am sorry that I must differ from my friend Dr. Dillon in my account of this scene, but, in reality, things happened in quite another fashion. I have it from several eye-witnesses that, far from addressing the representatives of the Zemstvos in a pompous or haughty manner, the attitude of the Emperor Nicholas was one of timidity and embarrassment, and it was with some hesitation and a lack of assurance that he read from the paper which he held in his hand, containing the famous address. Furthermore, I know *from an absolutely indisputable source*, that the response which the Emperor was to make had been the subject of lively discussion between the Emperor and his advisers. Nicholas II. hesitated to break lances with the delegates of the Zemstvos, and inclined towards a less peremptory reply, but his counsellors, headed by M. Pobiedonostzeff, persuaded him that he owed to the memory of his father a firm maintenance of the traditions of the preceding reign and that he must cut short all liberal pretensions.

It was M. Pobiedonostzeff who drew up the address which the Emperor received from his hands at the last moment before entering the hall of audience. He read it in a bungling manner, and certainly without a clear comprehension of its significance.

When one thinks of the wide circulation of this unfortunate speech, brought back by the representatives of the *Zemstvos* to their constituents in the uttermost corners of Russia, one will understand my assertion that this first contact of Nicholas II. with his people marks the beginning of a misunderstanding which from that day never ceased to prevail between the Sovereign and the Russian nation, and which had its epilogue twenty-three years later in the abdication of Pskoff.

The author of the Emperor's reply to the *Zemstvos*, M. Pobiedonostzeff, retained his former office—that of Procurator of the Holy Synod—under the new reign. This man, who was called the Russian *Torquemada*, was truly the evil genius of Nicholas II., whom he succeeded in drawing completely under his influence. I will not stop to portray this sinister personage, who retired from the stage of political life on the very day that I joined the first constitutional Cabinet of Russia. He is a familiar figure in history, and to describe him properly would take, not only a chapter, but an entire volume. So I will limit my comment to the bare statement that to my mind M. Pobiedonostzeff always personified that which was most detestable in the old Russian bureaucracy, and that he, rather than the Emperor Nicholas himself, was chiefly responsible for the errors of the unhappy Sovereign's reign. I may add that on every occasion when I was brought in contact with him—and such occasions were quite frequent when I represented the Russian Government at the Vatican—we

had violent disagreements, and to this very day it is a subject of great satisfaction to me to remember that I defended against his tyranny the cause of religious liberty in Russia, at an epoch when there was no little risk in that course.

Among the men who are not as well known, but whose influence upon Nicholas II. at the beginning of his reign was hardly less fatal than that of M. Pobiedonostzeff, I must mention Prince Mestchersky, proprietor and sole editor of the ultra-reactionary journal, *Le Grajdanine*. This enigmatic personage, *grand seigneur* by birth, journalist—and journalist of great talent—by vocation, had played a very important rôle at the Court and in the intimate circle of Alexander III. His success is all the more inexplicable because his scandalous reputation, corresponding exactly to that of Prince Eulenburg at the Court of Berlin, contrasted sharply with the purity of habits which distinguished the father of Nicholas II. as well as Nicholas himself.

Prince Mestchersky, who had devoted himself to journalism from his earliest years, never cared for any bureaucratic employment or official position at Court. He enjoyed none the less direct influence upon the affairs of State during the reign of Alexander III. It was in the editorial rooms of the *Grajdanine* and in his salon, where he gave weekly receptions, that the ministerial candidatures were prepared, as well as the reactionary measures which marked that reign. These Wednesday receptions, which I never had the privilege of attending, were of the most heterogeneous aspect, it appears. Mingled with Ministers of State, high functionaries lacking portfolios, generals, prelates and journalists, there were to be seen beardless youths of decadent appearance to whom their host's protection had opened



KREMLIN, MOSCOW, RUSSIA.





the doors to the most varied careers, without excepting diplomacy.\*

In May, 1896, during his coronation at Moscow, Nicholas II. came in contact with his people for the second time, and he was quite as unfortunate as before. The fatality, which followed the entire life of the ill-starred Sovereign, seems to have seized upon this occasion to mark in advance the tragic outcome of his reign. No one has forgotten how the festivities at the coronation of Nicholas II. were overshadowed by a catastrophe very similar to that which took place during the popular rejoicings organized at Paris in 1770, on the occasion of the marriage of Louis XVI. The same cause, a hopelessly careless preparation by the authorities in charge of the arrangements, produced the same effect in both cases: an enormous crowd, in an enclosure that was not only too small, but badly arranged and without proper provision for entrances and exits, was seized by sudden panic, and a wild rush for safety ensued with horrible loss of life.

The Moscow catastrophe, regarding which I had an opportunity to learn precise details at the time it occurred, gave rise to the most inexact accounts and the most unfair comment. Dr. Dillon, in the book that I have so often cited, states that the awful calamity ensued at the very moment when the Imperial couple took their places in the official tribune, saluted by the military band playing the national hymn, and when "half a

\* When, after succeeding Count Lamsdorff, I was obliged to dismiss certain of these protégés of Prince Mestchersky from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the editorial rooms of the *Grajdanine* became the most active centre of the intrigues against my person and my policies. During my four years as Minister hardly a single issue of that journal appeared without a violent attack upon me, denouncing me as a "Cadet in disguise," and almost as an accomplice of the revolutionists.

million voices acclaimed the young autocrat of Holy Russia and his consort." The author continues, insinuating that the Emperor showed little or no emotion over this public calamity, and ascribes to his inaccessibility to human sorrow and his incapability of realizing the depth and force of public opinion the fact that the disaster did not interrupt the series of dinners and balls which took place at the Court and the foreign embassies until the very end of the festivities.

The facts were as follows :

I was at the time Russian envoy to the Vatican, and, as Pope Leo XIII. was represented at the coronation ceremonies by an ambassador extraordinary, Mgr. Agliardi, I had been asked by Prince Lobanoff, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to go also to Moscow to look after the details of the protocol, which were particularly complicated and delicate in connection with the presence of an apostolic Nuncio. In addition to my rank in the diplomatic service, I was a Chamberlain of the Imperial Court, and consequently had to fulfil the duties of that position during the coronation ceremony. While in Moscow I shared the apartment of my cousin, M. N. Mouravieff, who was then Minister of Justice, and not a day passed without my seeing intimately my wife's uncle, Count Pahlen, who had been invested with the dignity of Grand Master of Ceremonies. This meant that I had an excellent opportunity to follow, not only the natural course of the festivities, but also the smallest details of what was going on behind the scenes and in the intimate life of the Court.

The catastrophe occurred at a very early hour of the day, and long before the Emperor and the Imperial Court were expected to arrive at the scene of the popular fête. A few moments after, my

cousin was called to the telephone, and then came to wake me, telling me what had occurred and proposing that I accompany him to the scene of the disaster, where he was obliged to proceed in his official capacity.

Even to-day, after twenty-two years, I cannot without a shudder think of the spectacle that we saw when we reached the Hodynskoie-Polie, the parade ground where the fête took place. My readers will understand how painful it would be for me to dilate upon the details of the awful scene. It will suffice to say that, pending the arrival of the Minister of Justice, whose duty it was to make the preliminary investigations, nothing had been done beyond first aid to the wounded and dying, and no removal had yet been effected of the dead, numbering over three thousand, who lay in heaps in front of the gates at which food and gifts were to have been distributed. I passed the greater part of the day on that field of death and desolation, doing my best to assist in rescuing the victims, and not returning to the city until evening to attend to the duties of my position.

I had no occasion to be in the Emperor's presence during the days immediately following, but through M. Mouravieff and Count Pahlen, as well as through other persons in Court circles, I was well informed in all its details of the effect produced by the catastrophe at the palace of the Kremlin. I am able, therefore, to testify, with full knowledge of the circumstances, that, far from being insensible and indifferent, Nicholas II. was deeply moved, and his first impulse—a generous one—was to order the suspension of the festivities and to retire to one of the monasteries in the environs of Moscow for the purpose of giving public expression of

his pity and sorrow. This project was the subject of a heated discussion among the members of his suite, some of whom, like Count Pahlen, commended his idea, and advised him to punish severely, without regard to their position, the personages responsible for the disaster—and first of all the Grand Duke Sergius, the Emperor's uncle and Governor-General of Moscow—while others, notably M. Pobiedonostzeff and his friends, maintained that such action would upset the minds of the people, and produce a bad impression upon the numerous princes and foreign representatives gathered at Moscow. They claimed also that to give public recognition to the fault of a member of the Imperial family would be equivalent to an attack upon the monarchical principle. These evil counsels, alas, prevailed, as they have too often. The festivities followed their course. The same evening there was to be a ball at the French Embassy, in presence of the Imperial couple and all the Court. The Ambassador, Marquis de Montebello, and his wife, both of whom were greatly loved in Russian society, and who naturally knew what was going on at the Kremlin, waited anxiously for notice that the Sovereigns would not be present at their fête, and prepared to cancel their invitations. No word came and they could do no other than throw open the doors of the Embassy on that day of national mourning. I was at that ball and distinctly remember the dismal aspect that reigned. The effort that it caused the Emperor and Empress to appear in public could be clearly seen in their faces. There were some who blamed the French Ambassador for not having taken the initiative and cancelling the ball. I can certify that the Marquis and Marquise, possessed as they were of keen sensibility and perfect tact, were obliged, much against their will, to conform to the superior

will proceeding from the deplorable counsels I have mentioned.

Count Pahlen, former Minister of Justice under the liberal reign of Alexander II.—a man of advanced years and of the most distinguished bearing, well known for his independence and rectitude—was designated by the Emperor personally to inquire into the causes of the catastrophe and to decide who were responsible. Thanks to my intimacy with him, I was able to follow day by day his investigations, and I was astonished, as I have been on other occasions, by the strange division existing in Russia between different administrative departments. In this case, the popular fête, which was to bring together nearly a million people, had been organized by two distinct powers, the Grand Duke Sergius, Governor-General of Moscow, and Count Vorontzoff-Daschkoff, Minister of the Court, each of whom threw the blame upon the other. It was proved that, if the Grand Duke Sergius was not the only one guilty, he was sufficiently involved to warrant a severe disciplinary penalty. Count Pahlen did not hesitate to demand his punishment, but he encountered a storm of opposition from the other Grand Dukes and the ultra-monarchical party, who carried off the victory with all the more ease because it concerned the brother-in-law of the Empress. The Grand Duke Sergius, who had great influence upon Nicholas II. at that period, was married to Princess Elizabeth of Hesse, sister of the Empress Alexandra. She was an angelic creature, who, after the tragic death of her husband (killed by the terrorists in 1905), retired to an almost monastic life, devoted entirely to works of practical charity. In the end a few subordinates had to bear the blame, and the Grand Duke, having been exonerated, continued to govern the old Russian capital,



whose inhabitants disrespectfully baptized him "Prince Hodynsky," in memory of the spot where his negligence had worked disaster.

The deplorable incident which marred the Emperor's coronation was considered by the public as of evil augury for the future of his reign and for his personal destiny. People saw in it a presage of events similar to those which afflicted Louis XVI. A few days later another thing happened, which remained almost unknown, but which, if it had been noised abroad, would have strengthened this impression.

I was myself a witness of this mishap. As a chamberlain of the Court the Emperor had designated me, with five other chamberlains, to hold the Imperial mantle of cloth of gold, lined with ermine and four or five metres in length, which the Emperor put on again during the ritual, after having received the sceptre and globe from the hands of the Metropolitan of Moscow and before placing the Imperial crown upon his head. At the most solemn moment of the ceremony, when Nicholas, followed by his assistants, and wearing his crown and Imperial mantle, passed through the nave of the cathedral towards the grand altar to receive the unction which consecrated him Emperor—a chain in brilliants, of the collar of the Order of Saint Andrew, came loose from the mantle and fell at his feet. One of the chamberlains bearing the mantle picked it up and handed it to the Minister of the Court, Count Vorontzoff, who put it in his pocket. All happened so quickly that it was noticed by no one except those who were next to the Emperor. As I have said, I was of that number and so missed nothing of the incident, of which I am perhaps the only surviving witness. After the ceremony all those who saw it were ordered not to speak of it, and, curiously enough, it



never reached the ears of the public, and I myself disclose it now for the first time.

If I have stopped to relate the incident, which may appear to practical minds as rather insignificant, it is because I am sure that it produced a profound impression upon Nicholas II., and contributed perhaps to increase his natural tendency toward fatalism and superstition. He saw in it a warning of the trials which he had resolved to bear, as coming from the divine will, and which eventually he did bear, in fact, with extraordinary calmness and resignation.

The few years following the coronation at Moscow were the only relatively calm and prosperous years of his reign. During this period the character of Nicholas II. gradually developed into the definite form which manifested itself in the epoch marked by the beginnings of the revolutionary movement in 1905 and by the Russo-Japanese war.

There were many influences that shaped this unfavourable development of the Emperor's character: a persistence of the impression made upon a feeble and sensitive nature by the dominating will of the Emperor Alexander III.; systematic effort on the part of the former counsellors of his father to preserve the traditions of the preceding reign; later, the pernicious promptings of frivolous and servile ministers like M. Sipiaguine, or so unscrupulous as M. Plehve, and of mere adventurers like M. Bezobrazoff; lastly, and above all, the empire over a mystical and superstitious nature of a feminine mind stronger than his, but even more steeped in mysticism, so that both fell victims to the hypnotic powers of such impostors as the medium Philippe and the peasant Raspoutine.

Even if we concede a certain respect to statesmen

of the stamp of M. Pobiedonostzeff, moved by deep convictions and putting in practice their talents and undisputed abilities, however mistaken they might be—what is there to say in favour of that category of Ministers, as inconsequent as they were ignorant, whose only aim was to advance themselves in the favour of their Sovereign by flattering his reactionary tendencies and his taste for puerilities. The most accomplished type of these “amusers” was M. Sipiaguine, Minister of the Interior, who owed this post to his family connection with one of the prominent men of the reactionary party, Count Scheremeteff. It was this Minister who had the idea of reviving at the Russian Court the traditions of the reign of the Czar Alexis Michailovitch, the second Romanoff, and father of Peter the Great. In contradistinction to the restless period of reforms borrowed from the Occident by the son, the patriarchal and purely Muscovite epoch of the father was lauded, and it became the fashion among the intimates of Nicholas II. to eulogize the “Most Tranquil Czar” (*Tichaishij Tzar*) given to pious exercises, governing by kindness, devoted to his family and kin, and making place at his councils for the beautiful and virtuous Czarina Nathalie Narichkine. It was because of his fanciful predilection for the Czar Alexis that Nicholas II. gave to his heir a name that had fallen into disuse among the Russian sovereigns since the tragic death of the son of Peter the Great, the unfortunate Czarewitch Alexis, who revolted against the progressive ideas of his father and was sacrificed by the great reformer for reasons of State. This fancy sometimes took a picturesque form, as it did one winter when nothing was thought of in the Emperor’s circle and the high society of the capital but the organization of a masquerade ball which reproduced in the halls of

the Winter Palace the semi-Asiatic splendours of the Court of the Czar Alexis Michailovitch. I was abroad at the time and so I only knew of it though the enthusiastic descriptions of those present. It was an extraordinarily gorgeous affair. The Imperial couple, clothed in splendid garb which displayed to great advantage the juvenile grace of the Emperor Nicholas and the majestic beauty of the Empress Alexandra, personified the Czar Alexis and the Czarina Nathalie respectively. The Grand Dukes, Grand Duchesses and members of the high society of St. Petersburg rivalled each other in their display of priceless furs and precious stones. This ball, which was not only a marvellous spectacle, but also a sort of symbol of the Emperor's political ideas and those of his counsellors, marked the half-way and the apogee of the reign of Nicholas II., soon to be darkened by the approach of all manner of troubles and calamities that crowded the second half.

It was this same M. Sipiaguine who had a room in his official residence at St. Petersburg decorated in the style of the apartments of the ancient Czars in the Palace of the Kremlin, and there received the Emperor Nicholas with all the rites observed at the Muscovite Court of the seventeenth century. Again at this performance the Emperor played the part of Alexis Michailovitch, and M. Sipiaguine appeared as the Boyard Morozoff, the all-powerful Minister of the Czar.

While the Emperor and his singular Minister of the Interior were amusing themselves with these innocent masquerades, the real functions of a Morozoff were exercised by M. Pobiedonostzeff. The influence of this sinister personage made itself felt in all the affairs of the State, and his action alienated more and more the intelligent and enlightened classes of Russian society,

and threw them into the opposition, if not into the revolution itself.

The method adopted by M. Sipiaguine and his friends was to flatter the young Sovereign systematically and to give him an exaggerated notion of his power and administrative talents. In this direction none surpassed Count Mouravieff, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1897 to 1900, whose sycophancy was only equalled by his ignorance of public business. His predecessor, Prince Lobanoff, was a veritable statesman, but his ministry was cut short by his death, having lasted but a few months. That eminent diplomat and historian of the first order had set himself the task of grounding Nicholas II. in history and diplomatic science when he made his verbal reports. He appreciated the keen intelligence of his Sovereign, and had a quasi-paternal affection for him. The Emperor, habituated to a totally different procedure on the part of his other Ministers, submitted with deference, but not without a certain ennui, to these lessons from the former servitor of his grandfather. The lessons came to an untimely end when Count Mouravieff succeeded Prince Lobanoff, and lost no time in taking a diametrically opposite course to that of his predecessor. He declared to all who cared to listen that he was only the obedient executor of his master's orders, and that the Emperor, whose profound diplomatic knowledge he vaunted on every occasion, decided the smallest details of the nation's affairs in complete independence. I recall that one of the foreign Ambassadors accredited to St. Petersburg asked me one day if such statements were to be taken literally or if Count Mouravieff considered it as a clever way of escaping responsibility. I had trouble to convince the diplomat referred to that such was, in fact, the

method adopted by our Minister of Foreign Affairs in his relations with the Sovereign.

We have seen that Count Lamsdorff, who succeeded Count Mouravieff in 1900, improved upon this method, and carried his self-effacement so far as to remain at his post even when he ceased virtually to exercise his functions and the Emperor decided the most important questions of his department with the help of M. Bezobrazoff and his band.

To close the list of Ministers who contributed towards the formation of the Emperor's character I have only to add the name of M. Plehve, who succeeded M. Sipia-guine as Minister of the Interior. We now have to do with a personage of much greater calibre. Endowed with remarkable intelligence and a strong will, he pursued untiringly his objects, which were to strengthen the autocratic power and the system of bureaucratic centralization. He was a veritable incarnation of the police system, carried to its highest degree, and was absolutely unscrupulous in the choice of his methods, some of which were of the most surprising nature. He it was who organized, with the help of a certain Zubatoff, the workmen's associations, whose duty it was to combat the influence of the Socialists by resorting to the same means as were employed by the latter. In other words, they were to organize strikes, which, however, were secretly directed by the police. He must also be credited with having fathered the police system of using two-faced agents, who served the Government and the terrorists at one and the same time. One of the most notorious of these agents, Azeff, was unmasked by the Russian publicist, M. Bourtzeff. M. Plehve himself ended by being a victim of this astonishing organization, for he perished in the course of a plot in which



Azeff took an active part, as was discovered later. The same Azeff was concerned in the assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius some time afterwards.

The ministry of M. Plehve coincided with the events immediately preliminary to the Russo-Japanese war. Although thoroughly cognizant of the true character of M. Bezobrazoff and his friends, he not only refrained from withstanding their influence over the Emperor, but, repeating the error which has led so many times to ruin—that of seeking in a foreign war an escape from the danger of revolution within—he pushed Nicholas II. further and further upon the way to a conflict with Japan.

It can easily be imagined how the men whom I have just described succeeded in destroying gradually whatever good judgment he might originally have possessed, and prepared the way for the adventurers who won his confidence soon after and led him into the most foolish and hazardous of schemes. Of all these adventurers the most astonishing and persuasive was M. Bezobrazoff. That this half-mad, preposterous person could have played a leading rôle for several years, to the extent of plunging Russia into war, still passes my comprehension. He was of good family, his father being reputed very wealthy and having been Marshal of the Nobility for the Province of St. Petersburg. M. Bezobrazoff was at first an officer in one of the crack regiments of the Imperial Guard, to which my brother also belonged, and I met him often at that period. He suffered reverses of fortune and left the regiment to take service, it was rumoured, in the civil administration of Siberia. It was not until twenty-five years later that he appeared on the horizon of St. Petersburg, and it was learned with some astonishment that he had succeeded by obscure means



in gaining the confidence of the Emperor, to whom he had submitted a vast plan for political and economic expansion in the Far East. It was no less a matter than the famous forest concessions of the Yalu, which became afterwards the stumbling block in the negotiations between Russia and Japan and the final cause of the war between the two countries.

I will not tire my readers with the details of the schemes of M. Bezobrazoff, who claimed he was about to throw open vast political perspectives to Russia, and promised fabulous profits to the subscribers at the same time. Suffice it to say that it was precisely the fantastic and venturesome side of the project that appealed to the imagination of Nicholas II., always receptive to chimerical ideas. A more difficult thing to explain is the ascendancy gained by that incoherent and pretentious braggart over a nature as fine as the Emperor's. One theory to account for the favourable reception of M. Bezobrazoff's schemes was that the Emperor was dazzled by the billions that were flashed before his eyes. This is absurd, as Nicholas was absolutely indifferent to money, and had no thought of its value. He inherited his father's simple tastes, and the enormous sums inscribed in the budget for the expenses of the Court, added to the revenues derived from the properties of the Imperial Cabinet, were more than sufficient to provide for his needs and those of his family. To substantiate this assertion I will say that Count Witte, who was then Minister of Finance, was informed by the Emperor of the Yalu affair and opposed it strongly, but, in spite of his well-known dislike of Nicholas, he never imputed any interested motives to the Emperor in connection with the scheme.

However that may be, M. Bezobrazoff, backed by the

Admirals Abaza and Alexeieff, gained such influence over the Emperor that he put in the adventurer's hands, not only the organization of this politico-commercial enterprise, but the entire direction of our diplomatic relations with Japan. He was promoted to the dignity of a Secretary of State and became, as it were, a Minister without portfolio, who arrogated to himself the right to correspond directly with the Emperor's representatives in the Far East, and communicated the Imperial orders to them over the head of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As I have said in a preceding chapter, it was because of this new turn in our relations with Japan that I asked to be relieved from the post of Minister at Tokio.\*

Is it to be wondered at, after reading all this, that the Emperor should have fallen under the influence of a vulgar impostor, the notorious Philippe, who began life as a butcher's boy at Lyons, became a spiritualist, hypnotist and a quack, was accused of various rascalities in France, and ended by being the favourite guest of the Russian Imperial Court, consulted by the Emperor and Empress, not only on all that concerned their per-

\* In order to give an idea of the Emperor's credulity and his tendency to listen to the wildest propositions, I will mention these two cases: while I was Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Ministers took up a project—with no intention of endorsing it, of course—that had been presented to the Emperor by a foreign contractor, and which contemplated the joining of Siberia to North America by a bridge to be built across Behring Straits. The plan provided for a concession to the contractor of vast stretches of territory on both sides of a railroad that was to terminate at the bridge. Another time it was an American who succeeded in persuading the Emperor that he had discovered a way to defend the frontiers of a country, even as vast as Russia, by the use of electric currents of such force that no enemy could possibly cross the line. This discovery was to do away with the maintenance of an army. He demanded, naturally, certain pecuniary considerations in advance before revealing his secret, and it was only with a good deal of trouble that the Emperor was dissuaded from going farther.

sonal affairs, but even, it is said, the most serious state matters ?

One can hardly help being struck by the similarity in the fortunes of Philippe, and of Raspoutine a little later, with the rôle played in French high society at the close of the eighteenth century by quacks and mesmerists of the same class. It seems as if a mysterious law of history worked the same result in these two instances, a century apart, decreeing that, upon the approach of a great revolutionary crisis, a society verging upon dismemberment must needs take refuge in the supernatural and the marvellous. It is true that Philippe was an impostor of the most inferior order, and can hardly be classed with a Count of St. Germain, a Saint Martin, or even a Cagliostro ; but the origin of their success is the same, and the influence of the "*Comte pour rire*"\* over the Landgrave of Hesse, of the "Unknown Philosopher"† over the Duchesse de Bourbon, or of Joseph Balsamo‡ over the Cardinal de Bourbon, does not differ from the control of Nizier Vachol, *alias* Philippe, over the Emperor and Empress of Russia.

Philippe's stay at the Court of Russia was of short duration and had no particularly serious consequences. The butcher's boy of Lyons appears to have had only pecuniary gains in view, and never sought to put his influence to the uses of a Court cabal or a political intrigue. His death left a place free for a much more formidable person, Grigori Raspoutine, who contributed materially to the downfall of the Romanoff dynasty and the dismemberment of the Russian Empire.

\* Name applied by Voltaire to the Comte de Saint Germain.

† This was what Louis Claude de Saint Martin called himself.

‡ The real name of Cagliostro.

The prodigious adventure of this unlettered, drunken and shameless peasant, who left a remote village of Siberia to become the intimate, the counsellor and, one may even say, the idol of the Russian Imperial couple, has already given rise to a copious literature. The many books which treat of his incredible career are naturally of unequal value. That which appears to me to be the clearest and best substantiated is the work I have so often quoted, Dr. Dillon's "Eclipse of Russia." I will not go into the matter here, for I am not able, from my own knowledge, to add anything useful or interesting. In fact, although Raspoutine's first appearance at St. Petersburg appears to date from 1905 or 1906, at about the time I became Minister of Foreign Affairs, he did not meddle with matters outside of the Court and the purely domestic affairs of the Imperial family during those years, and while I was a frequent visitor at the Palace I never chanced to see him and have no personal remembrance of him whatsoever. All I knew of him at that time I had from M. Stolypine, from some of the intimate frequenters of the Court and from my brother. Dr. Dillon states that my brother resigned his post as Procurator-General of the Holy Synod because of the intrigues of Raspoutine. This is perfectly true. It was due to the intervention of the Empress Alexandra in a series of ecclesiastical appointments that he did not approve. The Empress was instigated by Raspoutine, who did not venture yet to meddle in state affairs, but was anxious to oust certain prelates who were hostile to him and protect others upon whose connivance he could count.

I find only one part of Dr. Dillon's recital that is inexact. He repeats a story to the effect that M. Stolypine was cured by Raspoutine of a nervous shock caused by the explosion on the 25th of August. I can certify

that M. Stolypine was absolutely calm and self-contained at the time, and that he never had any idea, on that occasion or any other, of having anything to do with a person of whom he always spoke in terms of the strongest aversion.

I have my doubts also with regard to Dr. Dillon's assertion that it was due to the advice of Raspoutine that Nicholas II. refused to go to war in connection with the events of the year 1912 in the Balkans. The author evidently repeats what Count Witte once told me, but failed to convince me of its credibility.

I have already spoken of the deep religious sentiment that was at the root of the Emperor's spiritual life. How and by what steps this sentiment, which at the start inspired nought but respect and sympathy, was transformed into a vulgar superstition and a complete subjection to so false a prophet as Raspoutine, is a problem that I had no opportunity to solve by personal observation. I can only explain this evolution by the influence of the Empress Alexandra, whose exaggerated mysticism must have proceeded from pathological causes. To judge of a case of that kind it is not enough to be an attentive observer; it requires special knowledge, which I do not pretend to have, of the obscure phenomena of moral contagion and suggestion.

It is not less difficult, especially for occidental minds, to discern the complex causes of the power that a Raspoutine was able to exert, not solely over such vulnerable natures as those of the Emperor and the Empress, but in different degrees upon the majority of those who knew him. This power cannot, I think, be explained by the hypnotic faculties which he possessed to an exceptional degree. To comprehend this enigma it is necessary to have some knowledge of the different religious and mystical



movements that have started in Russia at one time and another, some of which grew to have a tremendous influence upon the souls of the Russians, whether among the masses or the upper classes. The common tendency of all these beliefs was in the direction of a sentiment of deep pity for the failings of the sinner, and the criminal even, and was accompanied by a faith in regeneration by divine grace. This so-called "religion of pity," which is to be found in the writings of Tolstoi and Dostoiewsky, sometimes suffered the strangest distortions, and degenerated into the extreme theory that, in order to obtain pardon, it was necessary to begin by sinning. Hence the curious customs of certain Russian sects, among them that of the "Khlystys," one of the most widespread. Their rites, which recall those of the *flagellants* and convulsionists, and in which mysticism is combined with erotic excitement, have had adepts, not only in the lower orders, but in the highest circles of Russian social life. Early in the nineteenth century the high society of St. Petersburg suffered a violent attack of mysticism. The Emperor Alexander I., on his return from Paris in 1814, set the example, under the influence of Baroness Krudener, and, if the famous woman who inspired the Holy Alliance did not herself join in the excesses of morbid piety which were the fashion, some of her admirers and imitators at least appear to have overstepped the line dividing mysticism from certain pathological manifestations. It will suffice to mention Madame Tatarinoff, a friend of Baroness Krudener, and openly protected for some time by the Emperor Alexander I. The reunions in the apartment which she occupied in one of the Imperial palaces of St. Petersburg appear to have resembled somewhat those of the "Khlystys."

I will go no farther than to mention these elements



of the problem without venturing upon any analysis thereof, and without going into unpublished and sensational details of a subject which I have touched upon only with the deepest regret. I agree entirely with Dr. Dillon's views, as expressed in his book, that the real importance of Raspoutine was to symbolize in the eyes of the enlightened people of Russia all that was odious in the autocratic régime, and that his function, which might be likened to that of a chemical reagent, consisted in bringing together and uniting all the elements of Russian society that were adverse to autocracy.

At the time when I assumed the duties of Minister of Foreign Affairs and came in contact with the Emperor Nicholas, he showed no excessive tendencies as yet towards mysticism and the ultra-reactionary ideas which characterized the latter part of his reign. The misfortunes of the Russo-Japanese War and the revolutionary outbreak that followed the war had visibly sobered and ripened him. After having had the happy inspiration to replace M. Goremykine by M. Stolypine, he showed every disposition to follow the advice of his Prime Minister. He deserves all the more credit, it seems to me, for remaining faithful to the new institutions, because his education and natural preferences inclined him towards reaction. I may say that as long as the influence of M. Stolypine prevailed and, I will add without false modesty, mine also, Nicholas II. never refused to listen to any appeal to his reason or his sentiments of loyalty.

This leads me to another accusation—the gravest of all—which has been brought against the Emperor Nicholas II., that of having been disloyal and treacherous.

I believe that I disproved, in a preceding chapter, certain interpretations of the attitude of Nicholas II. in the matter of the secret treaty of Bjorkoe, and

demonstrated that, although he displayed weakness and imprudence, nothing was further from his thought than treason towards his ally. It even seems to me that his spirit of loyalty is most clearly proved by the manner in which he behaved toward France and the other Allied Powers to the last day of his reign. Did not the former British Ambassador to Russia, Sir George Buchanan, render public homage to the Emperor's good faith when he declared that it was his duty to refute the story that the Czar of Russia had favoured the conclusion of a separate peace with Germany ?

"I am convinced," said Sir George Buchanan, "that there is not a word of truth in this rumour. The Emperor, without doubt, had many faults, but he was not a traitor. He would never have betrayed the cause of the Allies, and was always the faithful and loyal friend of England."

The French Government confirmed this statement by publishing at the same time a letter addressed by the Emperor Nicholas on May 13th, 1916, to President Poincaré, which clearly shows that, in spite of all the efforts employed to persuade him to treat with Germany, he never consented to abandon the Allies.

It has been said that a short time before his assassination a German general brought to him in his place of captivity a proposal from the Kaiser to obtain his liberty on condition that he would openly espouse the cause of Germany, and that Nicholas II. refused to receive him, thus practically signing his death warrant and that of his family. It is impossible to prove the authenticity of this story, but in the minds of all who knew Nicholas II. well there is not a shadow of doubt that it is the only response that he would be capable of making to such an offer.

The Emperor has been severely criticized for the manner in which he dismissed one or another of his Ministers, and for pretending to approve the advice of one of his counsellors and then following a line of conduct directly contrary. In proof of this the case was cited of a Minister of State who left his Ministry convinced that he enjoyed the full confidence of his Sovereign, only to find, when he reached his home, that he had been dismissed.

This account is true. I myself have had experience of the facility with which Nicholas allowed himself to be dissuaded from decisions that he had taken with every appearance of firmness and conviction. But all this proves only one thing—an instinctive fear, common to many very good and very weak men, a fear which beset him to excess—of saying or doing anything disagreeable to a person in his presence. When he had decided to dismiss a Minister he lacked the moral courage to tell him so to his face, but, on the contrary, treated him with twice his usual courtesy and attention and then had recourse to a written communication. If it has been said of him with some show of truth that he always agreed with the person with whom he was talking, it can be explained by the need that certain very sensitive natures feel, of attracting and charming all with whom they are brought in contact. There are men, and especially women, with whom this attitude is only an artifice and who employ flattery and a systematic agreement with other's views as a means of making dupes. (One of the masters in this art is the former Chancellor of the German Empire, Prince von Bülow.) In the case of the Emperor Nicholas I am convinced that this characteristic was involuntary and unpremeditated. It may have contributed to the reputation of being a *charmeur* which he

enjoyed, but without the shadow of calculation or conscious deception on his part.

Having now analysed, in a manner which, I hope, has not been too diffuse, the character of Nicholas, as formed by the influence of his environment from childhood up, it is with a certain measure of diffidence that I enter upon the corresponding synthesis. His was a character essentially vague and elusive, of *nuances* and half-tones, and is difficult to define in exact terms. The dominant trait appears to have been a feeble will, which prevented his undoubted qualities of heart and mind from asserting themselves with any effectiveness.

At the time of the crisis of 1905 it was this very weakness that saved the monarchy. The revolutionary movement which succeeded the reverses of the Russo-Japanese War was really due to causes much more remote, dating back to the preceding reign. This movement, repressed for thirteen years by Alexander III., would in time have inevitably broken bounds, even under the iron rule of that Sovereign, and, with greater reason, under the more feeble rule of his successor. But whereas Nicholas II., submitting to the inevitable, avoided a catastrophe by granting the charter of October 30th, 1905, the inflexible will of Alexander III., in all probability, would not have bent to the storm of events and would finally have been broken. As in the fable of the oak and the rose-bush, the weak survived where the strong would have succumbed.

Twelve years later, Nicholas II., under the guidance of the reactionary party, perished because he tried to combat the forces which could not be withstood. The real cause of the fall of the Russian monarchy was the senseless effort of that party to revive and perpetuate in the twentieth century, and in contempt of the needs

of a modern State, the anachronism of autocratic power ; “ the most dangerous of all powers,” wrote my ancestor, in the spirit of prophecy, to the Emperor Alexander I., “ for it causes the fate of millions of men to depend upon the grandeur of mind and soul of one man.” Despite his good qualities, Nicholas II. did not possess “ the grandeur of mind and soul ” necessary to withstand the poison of reaction, and so became the cause of the unprecedented catastrophe which has overwhelmed his millions of subjects. A redoubtable power, indeed, which pulls down an Empire in its fall, and whose collapse throws a great nation into anarchy.

If, notwithstanding considerable hesitation, I decided to take part in the controversy over the grave of the Emperor Nicholas, it was because I thought that my testimony, based as it is upon direct observation and an intimate knowledge of his character, could at the same time serve the cause of truth and clear his memory of certain unjust imputations. It might be difficult for me to put forward the same reasons for adding to what I have already said of the Empress Alexandra. In my relations with her I never crossed the barrier that Court etiquette prescribes between a subject—be he even a Minister and Counsellor of the Sovereign—and the Empress. I was never admitted to the narrow circle which surrounded her, and always felt as if I were held at a distance. The evident cause of her coldness towards me was my tendency in the direction of liberal and constitutional ideas. Therefore, in passing any judgment whatever upon her personality, I should be afraid of falling into the error of repeating unconsciously the exaggerations and mistaken statements that others have been guilty of. In this respect the Empress Alexandra met exactly the same fate as the unfortunate Marie



Antoinette, in that the vindictive public charged her with all the faults of a régime that had gained the hatred of a whole nation. It is certain that Marie Antoinette merited the title of "the Austrian" no more than the Empress deserved to be held up to public hatred as "the German." On this precise point I do not hesitate to speak explicitly : never did the consort of Nicholas II. have the shadow of a tendency to betray the interests of Russia. Stranger as she was by birth and by education to the country of her adoption, confined within the artificial atmosphere of the Court, and seeing men and things through a distorting prism, as it were, it is no wonder that she misunderstood the real aspirations of the Russian people, but it was in all sincerity and in the honest conviction that she was a Russian of the Russians when she favoured the antiquated methods of the ultra-conservatives and believed in the attachment of Russia for all the forms of autocracy. Never to my knowledge did she seek to dissuade the Emperor from his fidelity to the French alliance. On the contrary, that alliance, in the eyes of the two Sovereigns, was beyond discussion. It is true that the Empress Alexandra was unfriendly to the *rapprochement* with England, and gave her opinions very freely on that subject during my negotiations with the Cabinet of London, but at that time she did not play the prominent part in politics that she assumed later, and I never had reason to complain of any interference by her in those negotiations.

This is all that I can say of my own knowledge with regard to the Empress Alexandra. I will not touch upon the influence that her religious hysteria produced upon Nicholas II., nor upon the delicate subject of the protection which she accorded to Raspoutine. I can throw no new light on those two points, and my testimony



would serve no useful end. My readers will comprehend, furthermore, the feelings that impel me to bow in silence before a calamity which has overwhelmed, not only the Empress, but also the wife and mother, and which perhaps has been even more horrible than reported at first.

I feel more at ease in offering the tribute of an unreserved admiration to the mother of Nicholas II., the Dowager Empress Maria Feodorowna. Her charm, her goodness and her gracious demeanour illumined the rather sombre reign of Alexander III., and she was able to create an atmosphere at Court that sometimes mollified the most persistent criticism of that Sovereign's excessive absolutism. Since the fall of the monarchy in Russia she has been reproached for having tried to keep her son too long in leading strings, and for giving her support to the counsellors of his father when they smothered the slightest inclination on the part of Nicholas II. to free himself from his father's precepts. Without denying this accusation, I cannot agree that any blame attaches to the Empress Maria Feodorowna; she knew the vacillating nature of the young Emperor, and his lack of preparation for his task of governing the Empire. It was only natural that she should seek, at the beginning of his reign, to preserve his respect for the traditions left by his father, whose powerful personality had dominated in the most absolute manner all those who came in contact with him. But we have seen that, when she came to understand the danger that the continuance of those traditions involved for the monarchy, she did not hesitate to advise her son to make reasonable concessions, and she helped to save the situation in 1905. When other influences had prevailed over hers in the councils of the Emperor Nicholas, there was nothing for

her to do but remain a sad spectator of events which it was not in her power to prevent. And, to-day, can one imagine a more poignant tragedy than that of this superior soul, stricken in every fibre of her being by the martyrdom of her son and by the downfall of an Empire, of which she had been the good genius in other days? Having had the privilege of knowing the Empress Maria Feodorowna under particularly favourable conditions, and of receiving from her the most precious marks of confidence, I fulfil an imperious duty in laying at her feet the deep-felt homage of my devotion and of the pity that fills my heart when I evoke the image of her Calvary.

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I will make but brief mention of some of the other members of the Imperial family, none of whom played any conspicuous political rôle at the period covered by these memoirs. The Grand Duke Sergius at one time possessed considerable influence, and it was he who recommended to Nicholas II. certain Ministers who were noted for their reactionary ideas; but he was killed by the terrorists in 1905. I have already spoken of his widow, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, sister of the Empress Alexandra. After she retired to the religious community which she had founded at Moscow she gave up all connection with the outside world. But despite her tendency toward the same forms of piety practised by her sister, she evinced great hostility to Raspoutine, and she tried in vain to destroy his influence over the Empress.

The Grand Duke Nicholas, later generalissimo of the Russian armies in 1914, commanded at the time

the troops of the Imperial Guard, and gave all his attention to his military duties to the exclusion of politics.

The Grand Duke Vladimir had preceded the Grand Duke Nicholas in that command, but, having contracted the malady that proved fatal soon after, he was unable to remain in the army. He was a man of remarkable culture, and his knowledge of history was often the subject of admiring comment on the part of leading French savants. He rather inclined towards liberal ideas, and it was without any foundation whatever that he was represented as having urged Nicholas II. in the direction of reactionary measures, and especially as having had anything to do with bringing about the regrettable event of the 22nd of January, 1905.\*

He was always very sensitive on the subject of this false accusation, and I have often heard him speak in the severest terms of the methods adopted by the ultra-conservative party. His wife, the Grand Duchess Pavlowna, a German princess by birth, but thoroughly Russian and I might say French at heart, had many friends in Paris. She, also, was the object of unjust attacks for her supposed predilection for the interests of her native country. I happen to know that she was far from having any such tendencies, and that her opinion of the character and policies of the German Emperor was particularly severe—a judgment that the facts have since fully justified. During the winters, at St. Petersburg, she had an extremely agreeable salon, frequented by the élite of Russian society and the diplomatic corps,

\* On Sunday, January 22nd, 1905, a procession of several thousand workmen, headed by the priest-agitator Gapon, set out in the direction of the Winter Palace to present a petition to the Emperor in favour of constitutional reform. The procession was halted by the troops, who fired upon the manifestants and killed a considerable number. This "Bloody Sunday" is generally regarded as the commencement of the revolution of 1905.

to whom she continued to dispense a generous hospitality at her summer residence at Tzarskoie-Selo.

Among the other members of the Imperial family I will only mention the Grand Duke Nicholas Michailovitch, so well known in Russia, as well as in France, as the author of historical works which procured him the honour of being elected a corresponding member of the French Institute. Highly cultivated and remarkably talented, he was the only one of his family who adopted really liberal ideas, and he expressed them with such frankness that he was nicknamed "Philippe Egalité" at Court. He was on the best of terms with the Emperor, to whom he used to speak with entire freedom. They had a taste in common for historical studies, the Grand Duke being the active president of the Imperial Historical Society, of which the Emperor was honorary president. That society was founded during the reign of Alexander II. by a group of eminent men, headed by Prince Lobanoff and M. Palowtsoff, the latter well known for his great wealth and as an art collector. He rendered great service to Russian historical knowledge by publishing a very considerable number of diplomatic documents, taken from the principal archives of Europe. I was one of the very restricted list of members, and this brought me into frequent contact with the Grand Duke, who honoured me with his personal friendship for more than twenty years. The Emperor used to call a meeting of the Historical Society once a year, and he presided on those occasions. Communications on historical subjects were read by different members and all etiquette was banished. During the discussions which followed the Grand Duke shone in the front rank by reason of his profound erudition and prodigious memory. Despite the high esteem in which Nicholas II. held him,

the Grand Duke had no political influence and held no State position. Like the Empress Dowager, with whom he was on intimate terms of friendship, he remained a spectator and watched events as they took place, regarding them with a clear insight and often with anxiety and foreboding. The only reproach that I can bring against him is for not having risen above his passivity, and for not having made use of his great talents in more active and practical service to his country. As I write these lines I am still in ignorance of his fate since the triumph of Bolshevism, and I know not if he has fallen a victim to the massacres which have taken place recently in Russia.

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This study would not be complete if I omitted mention of the persons who made up the intimate circle of the Emperor Nicholas and the Empress Alexandra. Great political influence has been repeatedly attributed to this entourage, and it has been said that there existed at Court a "Potsdam clique," intent upon detaching Nicholas II. from France and throwing him into the arms of Germany. This report appeared the more plausible on account of the German sound of the names borne by the two principal members of his suite, Baron Frederick, Minister of the Imperial House, and Count Benckendorff, Marshal of the Court. There is no truth in the story; the Emperor Nicholas, like his brother, was extremely careful to draw a line of demarkation between his private life and the domain of politics; none of the people who belonged to his intimate circle were ever permitted to give advice upon public matters, which he discussed only with his Ministers. (He did not vary from this



rule except, alas, in favour of a few persons like M. Bezobrazoff, but they came from the outside, as it were, and never figured in his official suite.) In their turn, the Ministers never penetrated into the private life of the Imperial couple, and outside of their hours of conference with the Sovereign they appeared at the Palace only on official occasions. It is true that the Emperor made a certain exception in my favour, and I often had occasion to approach him in more intimate fashion than my colleagues, but this intimacy was, nevertheless, but relative and I was never, properly speaking, one of the very restricted number of persons who shared the familiar and personal life of Nicholas II. The personage who was nearest to the Sovereign was Baron Frederick, Minister of the Emperor's House. In his youth he had been one of the most brilliant officers of the Imperial Guard, and even at his advanced age he retained a most distinguished and elegant bearing. He was of an essentially loyal and straightforward nature, affable to everyone, and universally loved and respected. He had for the Emperor the devotion of an old servant who had grown up in the Court, and for the Empress a sort of chivalrous cult. He enjoyed the Sovereign's absolute confidence and had an undeniable influence over him, which he never sought to employ except for a good and just cause. This influence, however, as I have said, did not extend to the domain of public matters, in any permanent manner at least. There were, undoubtedly, occasions when one or another of the Ministers had recourse to him to place their ideas in a favourable light before the Emperor, but if he yielded to any such request it was always to forward a liberal and equitable cause. He refused to be an instrument of the reactionaries, and I can bear witness to the fact that he never



sought to influence Nicholas II. in a sense hostile to France and favourable to Germany.

All that I have said of Baron Frederick applies equally to the Marshal of the Court, Count Paul Benckendorff, younger brother of the late Ambassador to London. He had great personal charm and distinction, and confined himself strictly to the duties which the complicated customs of the Court imposed. Although very enlightened and liberal in his opinions, he never had any opportunity, unfortunately, to advocate them before the Emperor. He was not in the least degree an agent of German propaganda at Court, but on the contrary was particularly disliked, as was his brother, the Ambassador, by William II.

Neither can any political rôle be attributed to the Grand Marshal of the Court, Prince Alexander Dolgorouky, familiarly called "Sandy." This *grand seigneur*, belonging to one of the most illustrious families of Russia and to a branch of that family famous for their personal beauty, was a striking figure, of noble carriage and with the grand manner of the true aristocrat. With Baron Frederick and Count Benckendorff he formed a trio which gave to the ceremonies and receptions at the Imperial Court a *cachet* of elegance and good form such as I have never seen surpassed in any other court.

It is none the less true that there existed in Russia at that epoch a very powerful Germanophile party. It was not to be found at Court, but among the ultra-conservative members of the Council of the Empire. The Emperor contributed, perhaps without knowing it, to the strengthening of that party by systematically appointing to the Upper Chamber men professing reactionary views.

At the head of the Empress Alexandra's suite was the Grand Mistress of the Court. This position was filled at first by the Princess M. Galitzine, and, after her death, by Madame Z. Naryschkine. Both were veritable *grandes dames*, cultivated, distinguished and affable, but neither one nor the other obtained any real influence over the Empress, who did not admit them to complete intimacy. The only person who attained that distinction was Madame Wyruboff, who had no official status at Court. Her name has been often mentioned in connection with that of Raspoutine, one of whose first and most fervent adepts she appears to have become. I never met her but once or twice in my life, and I will abstain from any comment whatever with regard to her.

THE END











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