

1965

The Influence of Rasputin on Russian Imperial Court

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THE INFLUENCE OF RASPUTIN ON THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL COURT

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

The influence of Rasputin upon the Emperor and Empress of Russia is generally credited to occult sources. Hypnotic suggestion and drugs are usually stressed.

Of the autobiographical materials left to us, most are untrustworthy. Either the authors seek to defend themselves for their personal involvement with Rasputin, or they suffered reverses at his hands, collecting every scandal and bit of heresay at their disposal.

Just as bad are most biographies that deal with this subject. Merely paraphrasing autobiographical material, they rely more on fertile imagination, and their journalistic style stresses the dramatic and scandalous.

This thesis attempts to put Rasputin's influence upon the sovereigns into correct perspective. In order to do so, biographical materials stressing letters, diaries, and official memorabilia were utilized to probe events and circumstances in the lives of Nicholas and Alexandra. Witnesses were limited to those who had the closest associations with the imperial couple for long periods of time and whom researchers hold in high regard. The writer utilized a reading knowledge of French and Russian, as considerable portions of materials needed for this study have not yet been translated into English.

Whether or not Rasputin had magic powers is not worth discussing. His influence with the imperial couple was the direct result of circumstances which would have produced any number of

"Rasputins." In fact, one thing seldom stressed by those who deal with this topic is that Rasputin had predecessors and already established contenders who no doubt would have gained prominence after his assassination, had not the revolution interfered.

What enabled Rasputin to gain the confidence of the imperial couple was not simply his ability to give some measure of relief to their dying son. He appeared to them as that distant and noble soul of the Russian peasant which they sincerely believed to be the true soul of Russia.

Alexandra believed that Rasputin was God's messenger to her and her husband. Because she had been estranged early from the social and political life in the capital, Alexandra felt a stranger in a nation over which she was Empress. In time Rasputin was one of the very few to win her complete confidence in that lonely existence. With Nicholas as Commander-in-Chief at the front, Alexandra won his approval as regent in charge of internal affairs of the nation. The rest of the story fell simply into place. Rasputin spoke; she had authority and acted. There is no evidence of the use of hypnosis or drugs. Alexandra truly believed that God had sent a messenger to save Russia and the throne.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been said that there are already too many books written about Rasputin. From the sheer number of works about him, this appears to be true. Generally, however, these works have one of two common failings: either they stress the sensational side of the Rasputin theme, or they treat the theme most subjectively, overlooking a good deal of evidence that might contradict their conclusions.

Of the books that deal with Rasputin specifically, two may be cited as examples to illustrate how authors have approached the treatment of Rasputin in history. One is René Fülöp-Miller's Rasputin, The Holy Devil.¹ This is perhaps the most popular work on Rasputin known to the reading public, but it has shortcomings which the critical reader cannot fail to notice immediately. The first shortcoming is the lack of documentation within the text itself. While no one will fail to be impressed by the extensive bibliography presented, a closer look will reveal any number of biographies and autobiographies of dubious merit, especially those whose associations with Rasputin resulted in feelings of absolute hatred or unbending loyalty. Furthermore, Fülöp-Miller admits that a considerable portion was taken from personal interviews, with the manuscripts in his possession only, and one is left to guess who

¹New York: The Viking Press, 1928.

said what to whom. The second shortcoming of this sizeable volume is the style of writing itself. Obviously journalistic the book stresses the dramatic and scandalous. While some of his material can be authenticated, the question of "fact or fiction" is left mainly to the reader's discretion.

Another book, and one of very recent origin, is Colin Wilson's Rasputin and the Fall of the Romanovs.² This book has been heavily attacked by the critics,³ and certainly with justification. The bibliography for such a complicated study is hardly adequate, and it consists of such works as I, Anastasia by a woman who claims to be the youngest daughter of the last Tsar, Nicholas II. The documentation is almost non-existent.

Wilson's disregard for facts to authenticate his conclusion is not the only objection. His basic theme is truly curious for he wishes the reader to view Rasputin not in the light of historical fact alone, but as a "possibilitarian." Wilson insists that Rasputin was not a "misfit" in the usual sense of the term, but had within himself a possibility of self-expression for which his native village provided no outlet. So that no misunderstanding may result from a paraphrasing of Wilson's use of the term "possibilitarian," the definition is given as it appears within his book:

Robert Musil suggested a more satisfactory word for Rasputin's type--a possibilitarian. Human life always

²New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1964.

³CF. Robert Payne in The New York Times Book Review, December 13, 1964, p. 20; Martin Malia in The New York Review of Books, 3:20, December 31, 1964; Oleg Ivsky in The Library Journal, 89:3952, October 15, 1964.

involves accepting certain things; even the most violent rebel must base his life on acceptance, on stability. The greater the rebel, the more he needs a solid basis on which to work. The rebel without such a basis is usually the criminal. But there is another extreme: too many human beings are too well adjusted; they accept the world exactly as they find it and their act of living is an act of minimum adjustment. They feel no interest in the possibilities of the universe. Stupid and brutal people are usually of this type.⁴

Wilson's treatment of Rasputin is just another example of a common approach used by many to treat the place of the "holy man" in history: a poor survey of basic facts supplemented by a fertile imagination. Wilson actually voices displeasure with those who have tried to treat Rasputin by means of historical fact. He writes:

If he [Rasputin] is presented in the Tolstoyan manner--as a mere part of history--the writer finds himself committed to detailing all the complicated and somewhat boring intrigues of the time, and certainly losing the reader's interest. Even Pares' book, as brilliantly written as it is, falls into this trap. The only apparent alternative--and the one chosen by his biographers--is the subjective treatment; to write 'the Rasputin story' as though it is a novel. But this method produces neither historical accuracy nor psychological truth.⁵

Wilson believes that readers have traditionally judged Rasputin's part in history erroneously, because they have submitted to pure fact alone. "We are not studying history," he writes, "but a man whose reality intersects history." Somehow, all of this results in a Rasputin who must be viewed in terms of a "Rilke or Van Gogh." Indeed, "only the name of Nietzsche comes to mind" to describe Rasputin's part in world events; a man who saw his daily life

⁴Wilson, p. 30.

⁵Ibid., p. 212.

"with an inner truth" that might not be recognized by men for another century, or even longer.⁶

Convinced that the reader must be persuaded by his arguments, Wilson has added, as an afterthought, an appendix on new materials concerning thaumaturgy and pre-vision.⁷

What seems more important than a search for new materials on the Rasputin question is the appraisal and sifting of the materials already available. In the chapter immediately following, reasons for choosing works cited in this thesis are indicated. Certain works about Rasputin have come to be regarded as "classics" on his activities, even though later evidence has since made their use questionable. Because some readers may question the absence of these works in this thesis, a few books in this category are cited with reasons for their lack of use.

This thesis is concerned with the question of Rasputin's actual importance in the lives of the imperial couple and members of the government. So that the elements of sensation and metaphysical speculation might be kept to a minimum, biographies and general works were used only when primary sources failed to shed sufficient light on basic issues.

It seems to the writer that these basic issues can be assimilated into three central questions: first, if we disregard any possibility that Rasputin was a supernatural figure, why would

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 221-31.

Nicholas and Alexandra take such a man into their close confidence? Second, did he mean something more to them than a mere instrument that appeared to give relief to their ailing son? Third, if it can be shown that Rasputin did gain something more than the respect due a successful physician, did this extend into matters of state sufficient enough to warrant the enormous animosities towards the imperial couple and Rasputin's subsequent violent death?

II

OUTLINE OF PRINCIPAL REFERENCES

The following is a list and explanation of works referred to in the body of this thesis. When circumstances seemed to warrant it, an explanation is given for books not used, as they are most frequently cited by others when dealing with this question.

I. Primary Documents: these works include copies of letters, documents, state papers, diaries, court records and other memorabilia whose authenticity, as to both author and content, has never been disputed. The use of this material will be found throughout any number of reputable and outstanding secondary works on the history of Russia to which they refer.

Bing, Edward J. (ed.). The Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Marie. London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson Limited, 1937. 304 pp.

A collection of letters between mother and son from his childhood to his death. Because of their close bonds of affection, the Empress Marie came to exert a considerable force on many of her son's decisions, especially during the early years of his reign.

Golder, Frank Alfred (ed.). Documents of Russian History 1914-1917. New York: The Century Company, 1927. 663 pp.

This book contains selected papers which the editor felt were most desired by researchers in Russian history at the time of its publication. Though the contents are incomplete for any involved study of the period indicated, an occasionally valuable piece of material will be found in this book.

Krasnyi Arkhiv. Moscow-Leningrad: State Publishing House, 1922-41. 106 vols.

The Krasnyi Arkhiv [Red Archives] comprises one hundred and six volumes of materials ranging from state documents to personal memoirs. The first volume was released in 1922 by the Soviet government and continued until 1941 when World War II forced the discontinuance of the project.

Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima. Moscow: State Publishing House, 1924-27. 7 vols.

Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima [The Fall of the Tsarist Regime] are the records of the Extraordinary Investigating Commission of the Provisional Government of 1917. These seven volumes comprise the testimony of former state officials called to account for their activities under the Tsar.

Pares, Sir Bernard (ed.). Letters of the Tsaritsa to the Tsar 1914-1916. London: Duckworth & Company, 1923. 478 pp.

Alexandra's correspondence with Nicholas during the time indicated. When Nicholas assumed the duties of Supreme Commander directly at the front, Alexandra was left "in charge" to administer business at the capital. Their letters to each other remain one of our most important sources in considering Rasputin's influence upon their decisions.

Pierre, André (ed.). Journal intime de Nicholas II. Paris: Payot, 1925. 302 pp.

Nicholas' personal diary from the years 1890 to his abdication in 1917. Within the margins are inscribed comments by his wife, showing that this most personal of documents was shared by them both.

Vulliamy, C. E. (ed.). The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa, 1914-1917. London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1929. 324 pp.

The letters of Nicholas to his wife during World War I. The importance of this correspondence between him and his wife has been noted above.

II. Secondary Works:

Florinsky, Michael T. The End of the Russian Empire. New York: Collier Books, 1961. 254 pp.

Thoroughly documented and filled with figures and statistics to back his arguments, Florinsky's contribution is invaluable for this study.

Pares, Sir Bernard. The Fall of the Russian Monarchy. New York: Vintage Books, 1961. 510 pp.

This mammoth work is a thoroughly documented record of an era by a man who experienced it first hand. Pares spent several months of each year in Russia from 1904-1919 studying contemporary history. During that time he enjoyed the personal confidence of many people directly associated with the government and imperial couple. Among his other works, A History of Russia remains an important contribution to the field. Praise for his accomplishments can be found in any number of publications by professors and journalists.

III. Biographical and Autobiographical Material: The choice of biographical and autobiographical materials for the Rasputin theme is considerably more difficult. It would seem that people are most successful in publishing this kind of material when the subject matter is sensational or if they had an intimate part in events and thus wished to defend their role in them. In this section, reasons are given for the selection or rejection of this type of material considered for use in this thesis.

Alexander, Grand Duke. Once A Grand Duke. New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Incorporated, 1932. 348 pp.

The Grand Duke Alexander was a relative and close companion of Nicholas during childhood and his reign. The account of his service to the imperial couple is contained in his memoirs, Once A Grand Duke. Alexander married the Tsar's sister, Grand Duchess Xenia, and came to share a special place in the affections of Nicholas and Alexandra for the first few years of their reign. During that time they were invited to take apartments in the imperial palace at the invitation of the sovereigns. Not only did this strengthen the bonds of their friendship but Alexander was thereby able to write of the imperial couple from the vantage point of close confidant.

Gilliard, Pierre. Le tragique destin de Nicholas II et de sa famille. Paris: Payot, 1929. 304 pp.

Pierre Gilliard was the tutor of the children of the imperial family from 1905-18. His book is one of the few that gives us any knowledge of the family life of the Tsar. There is nothing of political significance within it, however, as his association with the family did not give him access to such information. Bernard Pares had the highest respect for him, writing in his memoirs: "It is in every way a noble and honourable book."¹

Kokovtsov, Vladimir N. Out of My Past. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935. 615 pp.

From 1904-14 Kokovtsov held the post of Russian Minister of Finance. In 1911, while still continuing to serve as Finance Minister, he was made Chairman of the Council of

¹Sir Bernard Pares (ed.). Letters of the Tsaritsa to the Tsar 1914-1916. (London: Duckworth & Company, 1923), p. vii.

Ministers. Kokovtsov's carefully developed memoirs and his loyalty to the imperial couple, even after he was removed from office, give his work an air of complete honesty, an honesty that has won him the respect of contemporary historians.²

Marie, Grand Duchess. Education of A Princess. New York: The Viking Press, 1930. 338 pp.

The Grand Duchess Marie was a cousin of Nicholas II. Her mother's early death caused her and her young brother to live at court under the guardianship of one of Nicholas' uncles, the Grand Duke Sergei, and his wife, the Grand Duchess Ella, sister of the Empress Alexandra. Marie's brother, Dmitri, was a direct party to Rasputin's murder, and her account of the days following the murder and Dmitri's subsequent banishment from the capital, is especially vivid in her memoirs.

Paléologue, Maurice. An Ambassador's Memoirs. 2 vols. London: Hutchinson & Company, 1925.

An almost day to day account of the French Ambassador's term in office at the Russian court. He had numerous contacts within Russian social circles and with members of the Russian royal families, especially the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. He was regarded with high affection by the Russian sovereigns.

Rasputin, Maria. My Father. London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1934. 157 pp.

This book offers what any objective reader would expect. It is filled with the most incredible denials regarding activities and practices of her father to which she herself must have been a witness. Parts of her book are valuable, however, when it pertains to early biographical material on her father's life.

Rodzianko, Mikhail V. The Reign of Rasputin. New York: F. A. Stokes Company, 1927. 278 pp.

Mikhail V. Rodzianko was the last president of the Duma and is described by Bernard Pares as a "typical country Tory of absolute honesty and integrity who was later to act almost as a minute bell to the sovereign as the danger thickened."³ Rodzianko's relationship with his sovereign was not one that Nicholas particularly enjoyed, but Rodzianko's fight to make Nicholas aware of the dangers of Rasputin required genuine courage.

²Sir Bernard Pares, The Fall of the Russian Monarchy (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 18, 32, 124-25, 499-500; Maurice Paléologue, An Ambassador's Memoirs (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), I, 134.

³Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 147.

Trufanov, Sergei Mikhailovich (Illiodor). The Mad Monk of Russia. New York: The Century Company, 1918. 187 pp.

This is one of the most popular works about Rasputin, yet it is one book which must be considered unacceptable. Once a supporter of Rasputin, Illiodor turned against him; and there is evidence to suggest that this action was prompted by a dispute over power, rather than Rasputin's religious qualities. A member of the clergy, Illiodor was unfrocked for being a party to an attack on Rasputin's person and his book was written after he fled Russia in 1914. He later admitted that he put into the book "a bit extra."⁴ What that "extra" is, there is no way of discovering. The untrustworthy circumstances of this work are overlooked for its value as sensationalism.

Vassili, Count Paul (pseud.). Behind the Veil at the Russian Court. New York: The John Lane Company, 1914. 408 pp.

Count Paul Vassili is a pseudonym of whom the publisher tells us nothing more than he "held an important post at the Russian Court."⁵ Considering this fact it is amazing that some have used this book as a major source of reference. Published in 1914 it contains no documentation. Its only interest is that a good deal of its harsh criticisms concerning the sovereigns and their association with Rasputin, were later validated after the monarchy fell. Perhaps the author was a friend of the circle of the Dowager Empress around whom those who disliked Alexandra found a common meeting place. However, it must be used carefully.

Vyrubova, Anna. Memoirs of the Russian Court. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923. 400 pp.

Anna Vyrubova occupies an unusual and curious place in the history of this era. She was the Empress' closest friend, and served as "intermediary" between Rasputin and the imperial couple. Anna had no influence whatever on political events and no one regards her as anything more than an individual intoxicated with the delight of being an "important intermediary." She adored Rasputin, and her book is entirely untrustworthy in its naive attempt to present him and the Empress as heroes in a sea of conspirators. When not dealing specifically with this issue, however, her details of the secluded and troubled life of Nicholas and Alexandra is one of the few accounts available to us.

⁴Ibid., p. 150.

⁵Count Paul Vassili (pseud.). Behind the Veil at the Russian Court (New York: The John Lane Company, 1914), from "Publisher's Note," p. v.

Youssouppoff, Prince Felix: Rasputin. New York: The Dial Press, 1927. 246 pp.

Prince Felix Youssouppoff was the principal figure in the plot that resulted in Rasputin's death. There is direct evidence, in the form of letters from his wife, to show that he was high-strung and given to dramatics. Even so, there is no evidence to indicate that his plan was motivated by any drive other than a desire to rid the nation of a man whom he believed to be leading that country to ruin. His book gives nothing but the sordid details and scandalous events in the life of Rasputin. To be sure, his viewpoints on Rasputin are extreme, suggesting that the sovereigns were continuously under the influence of drugs and hypnotic suggestion. Yet, it remains as a man's testimony who realized what possible consequences awaited him if his complicity in the deed became known to the imperial couple.

III

NICHOLAS AND ALEXANDRA

The story of Rasputin's association with the Tsar and Empress can best be understood in the light of the imperial couple's background. Nicholas II (1868-1918) never forgot that his birthday coincided with the day of the "longsuffering Job."¹ His whole attitude in life displayed a marked fatalism and a keen sense of inadequacy for the role he was destined to perform.²

There are some who allege that Nicholas' attitude may be traced directly to the relationship with his father, Tsar Alexander III. A man who dominated the entire scene with which he came into contact, the attitudes displayed by Alexander III were reminiscent of his autocratic grandfather, Nicholas I.³

Alexander's attitude toward his son Nicholas, though not without genuine affection, was one of overbearing regulation, a regulation which resulted in a marked dependency upon others and a lack of mature judgment.⁴ Both of these characteristics

¹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, p. 79; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 30; Paléologue, I, 98.

²Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 30-32; Michael T. Florinsky, The End of the Russian Empire (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 55; Grand Duke Alexander, Once A Grand Duke (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1932), pp. 168-69.

³Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 29-30; Grand Duke Alexander, pp. 62, 135, 165, 168.

⁴Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 30, 32-34; Grand Duke Alexander pp. 154, 173; Vladimir N. Kokovtsov, Out of My Past (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1935), p. 149.

could only prove a severe handicap for a man who was early to inherit an autocratic throne.

From early childhood Nicholas displayed a preference for personal contacts limited almost exclusively to members of his own family circle. Though this, in itself, need not be indicative of something problematical, his impressions of people he met and places he visited suggest a shy, even defensive man who observed, rather than participated in, events of which he was intricately a part.⁵

In 1890, at the age of twenty-two, just four years before he ascended the throne, Nicholas' father sent him and his younger brother George, on a good will tour of the Near East. It was Nicholas' first major trip on his own, and the correspondence between his mother and him, plus other materials, gives important indications of Nicholas' personality.

The tour proved a nightmare. The Empress Marie's first letter to him after the departure illustrates the family life of Nicholas: a mother who obviously viewed her son as a mere boy. Her reference to Nicholas' tears on his departure indicates a man hardly ready to assume the rigorous demands of such a tour.⁶ Furthermore, Nicholas could hardly find strength to carry out the vast and complicated demands of social etiquette, so dissatisfied was he with everything from his father's attitude

⁵Edward J. Bing (ed.). The Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Marie (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, Limited, 1937), pp. 31-40, 47, 53, 57-58; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 30-31; Grand Duke Alexander, p. 166.

⁶Bing, pp. 41-43.

to the lack of diversion available. To add to the anxiety, his younger brother George became so seriously ill (of the first stages of consumption that was later to claim his life) that he had to leave the tour at Bombay, and hardly had the imperial party reached Otsu in Japan than a fanatic struck Nicholas on the forehead with a sabre. Only the quick response of one of the touring party saved Nicholas from death.⁷

If the Prince's tour had not been a happy event for him, there awaited his return a situation of happier possibilities. For some time he had been grappling with the problems of his marriage to the beautiful Alexandra of Hesse-Darmstadt. Though Alexandra was by birth a German princess, her mother, Princess Alice of England, was a daughter of Queen Victoria. Princess Alice died in 1878, when Alexandra was barely six years old, and Alexandra came under the guardianship of Queen Victoria whose guidance in all her affairs moulded Alexandra into a Victorian Englishwoman.⁸ Alexandra has been described by many who knew her. From the various descriptions a portrait emerges of the young, future Empress: shy, introverted, not unfriendly, yet markedly aloof.⁹ Her most

⁷Ibid., pp. 43-45; Grand Duke Alexander, pp. 167-68.

⁸Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 34; Paléologue, I, 238-39.

⁹Grand Duke Alexander, pp. 169-70; Grand Duchess Marie, Education of A Princess (New York: The Viking Press, 1930), pp. 194-97; Paléologue, II, 203-04. As late as 1916, just one year before the revolution, Alexandra herself admitted that her former shyness and fear of ministers had only then abated. Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 22, 1916, p. 409.

outstanding characteristic, and the one which was to have enormous consequences on her own future and that of her adopted country, was her intense religious concern.

This religious concern became immediately manifest during negotiations between Nicholas and Alexandra over her necessary acceptance of the Russian Orthodox faith. It took all of Nicholas' persuasion, plus the gentle interference of both Kaiser Wilhelm II and the Empress Marie of Russia, to convince her to do so.¹⁰ It was in Alexandra's nature that once she had accepted this new faith she did not do so in mere form. Perhaps she felt that by a complete acceptance, she and her husband would be brought closer together; perhaps she was truly convinced. Whatever the reasons, Alexandra gave herself to her new faith with a fervor that was later to astound even the devout.¹¹

All this took place in the spring of 1894. The young and handsome couple then toured Germany, France, and England through the gay summer that followed the announcement of their betrothal.¹²

¹⁰Bing, pp. 75-76.

¹¹Ylorinsky, p. 58; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 133; Paléologue, I, 155-61. Maurice Paléologue, The last French ambassador to the Russian Court suggests that both Alexandra and her sister, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, were highly emotional with vivid imaginations and that they fervently embraced the Orthodox Faith as a reaction to a stern Protestant upbringing. The Grand Duchess Elizabeth was the wife of one of Nicholas' uncles, the Grand Duke Sergei; and following his assassination in 1905 she came to play one of the most important roles in the religious community of St. Petersburg. She founded an outstanding convent with herself as Abbess, and was one of the Empress' closest confidantes until they quarreled over Rasputin. Ibid., pp. 161-63.

¹²Bing, pp. 81-88; André Pierre, Journal intime de Nicholas II et de sa famille (Paris: Payot, 1929), pp. 45-88.

Neither they, nor anyone else, could have foreseen the sudden change of events that was too soon to thrust enormous responsibility upon their shoulders. Alexander III grew suddenly ill at the close of the summer. As no one immediately suspected that his condition was fatal, Alexandra had barely time to reach the bedside of her dying, future father-in-law. Thus her first appearance to the Russian people as their Empress was one of mourning.¹³ She was overwhelmed by the enormous demands placed upon her by the most dazzling and demanding court etiquette in all of Europe. With no time to learn the language of the customs of that vast land, Alexandra left some unfavorable impressions.¹⁴ Her rivals for political and social prestige were never to let her forget it.

¹³Grand Duke Alexander, p. 169; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 130.

¹⁴Grand Duke Alexander, pp. 55-57;169-70.

IV

THE AUTOCRACY AND MYSTICISM

The strength of Alexander III lay in his ability to accept the role of "autocrat," a man who decides issues after consulting with ministers whom he has appointed.¹ Nicholas II's inability to come to terms with this concept was an important factor of his unfortunate reign.

"Nicholas II spent the first ten years of his reign behind a massive desk in the palace and listening with near awe to the well-rehearsed bellowings of his uncles."² While it is true that he occasionally rose to the situation and made his demands felt, the evidence supports a confused, inexperienced and vacillating man who leaned considerably upon the decisions of others, especially his mother. His wife also saw this situation clearly, and from the very first days of their reign, she tried to coax him to be more independent.³ It is ironic to note that in the last years of their reign, when Nicholas' duties took him directly to the war front, Alexandra's daily letters to him were constant pleas that he should submit his decisions of major importance

¹ Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 59.

² Grand Duke Alexander, p. 173.

³ Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 38, 57; Kokovtsov, pp. 7, 130, 266-67, 519; Bing, pp. 109-11, 116-17, 127-28, 132, 134, 150, 162-70.

to the advice of Rasputin and herself.

While Nicholas was struggling to achieve a proper balance between the demands of his position and the problems of his inexperience, his immediate family circle was inadvertently causing him some serious embarrassments. The first was a succession of daughters, a situation which threatened to leave the throne of Russia to one of Nicholas' brothers, rather than to one of his own sons. In June of 1899 Nicholas' mother wrote him to express serious concern. She had learned that when prayers were being said for members of the royal family in churches throughout Russia, the expression "for the heir, Grand Duke Mikhail Alexandrovich" was being used. The Empress Dowager was insistent in her warning. "It should be urgently made known everywhere," she wrote, "that he is to be styled 'heir until a son is born' to you."⁴

The second embarrassment was the young Empress herself. The demands of court etiquette tended to put Alexandra under a severe nervous strain, and both the glitter and loose morals of St. Petersburg society offended her Victorian upbringing. She attempted to institute reforms by the unskillful tactics of ostracizing some court members of the oldest standing; this created immediate and irreconcilable enemies.⁵

⁴Bing, pp. 139-140.

⁵Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 140. Even during the last years of her reign, after twenty years as Empress, elaborate court procedures still upset the Empress to the point of near "hysteria." Paléologue, I, 14.

Alexandra's attitude in these matters was just one reflection of her overall philosophy of her role as "wife" of the Emperor. Her duties, as she imagined them, were closely akin to that of a middle-class housewife: to run her husband's house, bear him children, and become his most trusted advisor and companion. Beyond this she cared little for social events, and most came to regard her inactivity as an indication of a hostility toward themselves.⁶

Alexandra and Nicholas were entirely devoted to one another; indeed, they remained almost "lovers" until their deaths.⁷ Both were extremely religious, but this devotion soon showed signs of a strange mystical reaction. Soon after their accession to the throne, they were known to be seeking mystics in the capital.

St. Petersburg at that time possessed some unusual mystical sects. These sects were peculiarly Russian in character and to understand something about them helps to throw light upon the psychological characteristics of those apt to embrace them, in this case the Emperor and Empress themselves. A Russian who leaned towards mysticism did not do so merely in his religious life but in his social, political, and emotional life as well. From the religious viewpoint his faith was contemplative. He relied not so much on an intellectual approach to a religious question as on his emotional faculties. He was apt to "feel" a question

⁶Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 130-131; Paléologue, I, 111; Anna Vyubova, Memoirs of the Russian Court. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), passim.

⁷Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, passim; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 126.

as morally right or wrong, rather than refer specifically to scriptural direction.

Furthermore, his search for divine guidance made him feel a submissive instrument of strange forces such as fate, luck, or even magic. His "wait and see" attitude often led to passive resignation and even indifference.

An emphasis upon prophecy, especially by those whose characteristics implied abnegation of all worldly goods and a closeness to the Russian peasant, held for these circles in St. Petersburg a special fascination.⁸

Alexandra's first recourse to mysticism came over a keenly felt guilt at her inability to give Nicholas a son. In 1900, on a visit to France, the imperial couple were introduced to the first of several mystics who were later to bring such criticism to the throne. His name was Philippe Vachot, "an adventurer in mysticism, a professional soul doctor."⁹ The Imperial couple brought Philippe with them to Russia. His fascination for them lay in his assurance that he could determine sex, plus an ability to conduct seances that could conjure up the spirit of Alexander III.¹⁰

Whether these seances satisfied them, no one knows, but Philippe did succeed (in 1902) in convincing Alexandra that she was

⁸Paléologue, I, 99-100, 128; Kokovtsov, pp. 153, 167.

⁹Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 131.

¹⁰Ibid., Paléologue, I, 203-10.

pregnant. While it soon became obvious that she was not, he was nevertheless retained until his interference with questions of politics during the Russo-Japanese War forced the Empress to return him to France. She did this regretfully, however, and before departing he gave Alexandra a bell as a symbol that she should warn off advisors from the Tsar who did not share his views.¹¹ He also promised that she would one day have another friend like him who would speak to her of God.¹²

In an effort to discover who this new "friend" might be Alexandra resorted to mystics popular with the St. Petersburg society that fostered them. One was a man named Papus, who appears to have been a former associate of Philippe. Another was a cripple named Mitya Kolyaba. Brought from Kaluga to the Theological Academy in St. Petersburg, this creature's strange, incoherent sounds were meaningful prophecies to the right intermediaries.¹³

¹¹Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 131; Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, December 4, 1916, p. 442.

¹²Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 131.

¹³Ibid., p. 132; Paléologue, I, 345-46, III, 96-99.

RASPUTIN'S ORIGINS

Vladimir N. Kokovtsov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, sat behind his desk and observed the time uneasily. Gregory Rasputin had requested an appointment and Kokovtsov wondered what possible use he could be to this most notorious individual. As he waited to meet him for the first time, the Chairman recalled that Rasputin was both esteemed and feared in the capital for his relationship with the Russian sovereigns. Those who admired him said that he was a holy man capable of miracles; those who feared him claimed that he was from the Devil and controlled the minds of the sovereigns by occult powers.

As Rasputin entered the Chairman's study his small, deep-set eyes lent to his face such a repulsive expression that Kokovtsov was genuinely "shocked."¹ Rasputin explained that he was aware of the harsh stories circulating about his activities with the Emperor and Empress. He insisted that he wished nothing to harm the reputation of the sovereigns and wished Kokovtsov's advice in this matter.

The Chairman advised Rasputin to leave the capital, pointing out the stories only harmed the royal family. Rasputin insisted

¹Kokovtsov, pp. 296-97. Rasputin's physical appearance, his forceful manner and his eyes in particular left the same impression on all who met him, especially for the first time. See also Paléologue, I, 291-92.

that the stories were false and added that he went to the palace only when summoned. He willingly agreed, however, that it would be best for all concerned if he left the capital at that time.

The next day Kokovtsov learned that this entire conversation had reached the Tsar and that members of the royal court were angry with him. Somehow, they had been led to believe that the Chairman had insisted that Rasputin would be deported if he did not leave the capital of his own accord. In a special interview with the Tsar on the following day, Kokovtsov reports that Nicholas showed considerable concern over the rumor of Rasputin's threatened deportation. While Nicholas accepted his explanation that he had not at all threatened Rasputin, the Chairman was astounded that such a thing could carry so much weight with the Tsar. Kokovtsov was further disturbed to discover that the details of this interview had reached Rasputin, in fact within only a few hours after it took place.²

This was not the last time that the Chairman would feel the effects of Rasputin's influence, as would many others connected with the royal court. Had he tried to unravel the mystery of Rasputin's increasing influence with the Imperial family, he would have discovered that answers were not easy to obtain, as even to this day Rasputin's origins and the reasons for his association with St. Petersburg society remain something of a mystery.

²Kokovtsov, pp. 297-98; Paléologue, I, 146-47.

In the biography of her father, Maria Rasputin seeks to destroy many stories traditionally associated with him. He was born in the Siberian village of Pokrovskoe to a family of apparently moderate circumstances. His father owned a "dozen cows and some eighteen horses."³ Maria hastens to point out that neither was the village a settlement of deported criminals, nor was her father's name, Rasputin, derived from the word rasputnik (a debauched person) as some have alleged. If the name of Rasputin was derived from rasputnik, Gregory cannot be held responsible for it, as this was his family name when his great-grandfather settled in the area.⁴

It is true that Pokrovskoe was a typical Siberian village which might have been at one time populated by persons found unacceptable to one or another of the tsarist regimes. But it should be remembered that such settlers had been sent there for having antagonized members of the dynasty government, and not for what westerners would label as "crimes."⁵

At an early age Gregory and his community felt strongly that he possessed some strange powers of what today might be termed clairvoyance. He also held a strange power which his daughter terms "magnetism," a force which emanated from his extraordinary eyes and gave him a "certain authority" over people with whom he came into contact.⁶ This power, however, is not to be confused with hypnosis.

³Maria Rasputin, My Father (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1934), p. 29.

⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 134.

⁵Rasputin, p. 29; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 133.

⁶Rasputin, pp. 30-33, 43; Kokovtsov, p. 296; Prince Felix Youssoupeff, Rasputin (New York: The Dial Press, 1928), p. 50.

Maria is emphatic that her father never involved himself with hypnotic practices and that he even condemned hypnosis as coming from the Devil.⁷

Rasputin was never an ordained member of a religious order. He became recognized as a starets, that is, a man who leaves his native surroundings and goes forth to seek God's "truth." This is usually done by travelling to many places of worship throughout Russia, meditating alone in the wilderness or in private homes or monasteries. While doing this the starets lives the simple life of a peasant, wearing the humblest of clothing, and both counsels and consoles those with whom he comes into contact. His title, if one may use that term, is "father," or more simply, "man of God."⁸ These individuals, collectively known in Russian history as startsy, were by no means obscure within the fabric of Russian culture. Evidence of the role they played can be easily seen in much of Russia's literature.

At the age of nineteen Rasputin was married and settled on a farm in his native Pokrovskoe. He had four children of whom one, his first born, died at childbirth. Shortly after the birth of his fourth child, Rasputin saw a vision of Our Lady of Kazan, and after consultation with Makarii, a famous starets, he decided that he had been chosen by God "for a great achievement." In

⁷Rasputin, p. 34. Others are entirely opposed to this statement: Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 142; Youssouppoff, pp. 103-05.

⁸Rasputin, pp. 44-49; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 135; Youssouppoff, p. 22; Paléologue, I, 250-51, II, 102-03.

order to discover what that achievement should be, Rasputin decided to travel to the monastery of Mount Athos for prayer and meditation. This period of meditation proved a great disappointment. Hardly had Rasputin decided to take holy orders when "a scandal in the monastery" (for which Maria offers no explanation) made him leave at once.

Another consultation with Makarii calmed his anger. The starets counseled Rasputin to remember his mission and "since you have not found salvation in the monastery, try to save your soul in the outside world."⁹

The story of Rasputin's attempt to "save himself" is one filled with suppositions. While no one seems to doubt a personal background of debauchery, intrigue, and drunkenness, there seems to be no real source to verify it. He seems to have been involved at an early age with the khlsty members of a strange sect who claimed to find salvation by working themselves into a frenzy prior to taking part in sexual orgies. Pares notes that this charge was "never brought home"; yet he, too, admits that Rasputin's later behavior in the capital suggests the validity of it.

Rasputin obviously came to the attention of some of the most powerful members of the clergy, thus gaining access to influential persons. He was supported by such noted clergy as Theophan, Confessor to the Empress, and Hermogen, Bishop of Saratov.¹⁰

⁹Rasputin, pp. 45-47.

¹⁰Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 134-35.

Yet any concrete reasons why they so honored him, other than his appearance as a "man of God," cannot be discovered.

VI

RASPUTIN AND ANNA VYRUBOVA

There is no doubt that Alexandra's first association with Rasputin grew out of her concern for her haemophilic son. Born on August 12, 1904, his condition produced in the Empress a concern far exceeding anything to be expected of an average mother under the same circumstances. After almost eight years of hoping for an heir to the Russian throne, of jeers from her enemies for failure to provide that heir, the new Tsarevitch was doomed to a short life as a semi-invalid.¹

Rasputin's actual introduction to the imperial couple is as curious as any circumstances in the Rasputin story, and illustrates the psychological climate under which the sovereigns lived.

Two of the Empresses closest confidantes, the Grand Duchess Militza and Anna Vyubova, were both involved with that section of St. Petersburg society that was notorious for its dabblings in mystical experiences. The latter, Anna Vyubova, figures prominently in the whole Rasputin problem. She had early won the devotion of the Empress who made her a lady-in-waiting at the court. It was Alexandra and Nicholas who championed her marriage to an unfortunate officer whose nerves had been shattered in the Battle of Tsushima. After the dissolution of the marriage, Anna was retained at court out of pity, and a sense of guilt, by the Empress, and it was she who introduced

¹Princess Marie, p. 250; Pares, Fall of the Monarchy, p. 137.

Rasputin to the Empress.

Anna's relationship with the imperial couple was something unique, and an examination of some aspects of her life with the imperial couple throws considerable light on many of the strange circumstances which mark this whole era in history. She is most remembered as a woman of simple tastes, quite Victorian in attitudes and much like Alexandra herself. No one regards her as having any political significance whatever, believing her to be only an intermediary between Rasputin and the royal family. She was given a cottage on the palace grounds, and it was there that the regular meetings between Rasputin and the imperial couple usually took place.² The extent of her activity can be found regularly throughout the Empress' correspondence. Frequently she was sent by the Empress to question the highest persons of State. On such occasions she is described as listening with eyes averted while repeating word for word the information being rendered, so as to engrave it firmly in her memory. Paléologue reports that on the occasions she questioned him, her manner made him feel as though he were "talking into a phonograph."³

Anna enjoyed direct communication with the Tsar, as shown by his frequent thanking her for her letters throughout the correspondence to his wife. These letters and their contents are forever lost to us as the Empress herself, for reasons we can only conjecture, asked the Tsar always to destroy Anna's letters after he had read them:

²Paléologue, I, 133, II, 284-86; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 325.

³Paléologue, II, 50-1; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 284.

I send you a petition from our Friend, [Rasputin] its a military thing, He only sent it without any word of comment and then again a letter from Ania. Lovy, you burn her letters so as that they should never fall into anybody's hands?⁴

Nicholas answered: "I always tear up A.'s letters into small pieces after having read them, so that you need not worry. None of her letters will be preserved for posterity."⁵

Anna was a typical member of the aloof, actually closed circle of associates around the Imperial family. In the many memoirs left to us of this era, constant comparisons are made between the regal and lavish entertainments given by Nicholas' father and Nicholas' own, relatively colorless existence. Alexandra's attitude toward St. Petersburg social life was, of course, directly responsible.⁶

Both the Tsar and Empress were as completely devoted to Anna, as she was to them. Furthermore, with the Empress' seclusion leaving Anna as a major source of information about persons and events, no one denies that her conclusions on any number of questions held considerable sway with Alexandra. Paléologue went so far as to state that the Emperor never decided anything without his wife's opinion and that the "net result is that it is the Empress and Madame Vyubova who really govern Russia."⁷

⁴Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, January 6, 1916, p. 255. Except where specifically indicated by brackets, all material directly quoted from the Empress' letters is given as she herself wrote it, including parentheses, abbreviations, italics, dashes and misspellings. The Empress wrote her letters to her husband in English, and despite her English background, she had not mastered the language very well.

⁵C. E. Vulliamy (ed.). The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa, 1914-1917 (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Limited, 1929), January 9, 1916, p. 132.

⁶Paléologue, II, 42-43.

⁷Ibid., I, 229-30.

From the uncertain vantage point of retrospection, one can only speculate about a different course of events had Alexandra's window to the world been less dependent upon the eyes of the mysterious Anna Vyrubova.

VII

RASPUTIN AT THE CAPITAL

There is little evidence to support any contention that Rasputin seriously ventured into affairs of State much before 1912. It was, however, from the time of his introduction to the sovereigns in 1905, to 1912 that his foundation for such an eminent relationship was laid. Kokovtsov personally told Bernard Pares that when Stolypin's¹ children were seriously injured in an attempted assassination on his life in 1906, Nicholas offered Rasputin as a healer.²

Rasputin's ability to bring some measure of relief to the Tsarevich was not his only means of gaining the loyalty of Nicholas and Alexandra. He was constantly admonishing them to be autocratic to the full, and his anti-Duma sentiments only further assured the sovereigns that he was sympathetic to the principles of monarchy. Rasputin never lost the opportunity to denounce the Duma, insisting that any difficulties between the sovereigns and their subjects were due to the agitation of this representative assembly.³

Between the time of his introduction to the royal family and the year 1912, Rasputin became a favorite in the highest social circles. It was then that reports of his sexual excesses began to

¹Peter Stolypin, Prime Minister of Russia from 1906 until his assassination in 1911.

²Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 142.

³Kokovtsov, p. 361.

be heard throughout all of St. Petersburg: Mothers complained of relations between Rasputin and their daughters; husbands threatened to murder him.⁴

As these exploits began to be told in the most open places, criticism began to fall upon the Imperial family itself. What could the sovereigns be thinking of by inviting such a promiscuous adventurer into their closest confidence? It was then that the *Express*' enemies began their strongest attacks. This woman, who had come to Russia with all her disdainful attitudes on St. Petersburg society, was now said to be involved with one of the most disgusting lechers.

As Rasputin's growing political influence became more obvious, one of the loudest voices of protest came from the Orthodox Church. It is understandable that Rasputin desired to control this most important body. Knowing that his strength in that direction must lay with the hierarchy, he began using his relationship with the royal family as a lever to press appointments. We have statements in writing, for instance, telling how Rasputin forced the appointment of a semi-literate, vegetable farmer, Varnava Nakropin, to a bishopric.⁵

As the public criticism of Rasputin grew louder, therefore, it was the church that decided to act first. In January of 1912 two of the most important of the St. Petersburg religious community, Bishops Hermogen and Illiodor, trapped Rasputin into a meeting in which a confession was beaten out of him. They directed him to

⁴Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 146-147, 298.

⁵"V tserkovnykh krugakh pered revoliutsiei" [Among church circles before the revolution], Krasnyi Arkhiv, XXXI (1928), 211.

leave the capital, shouting "you are smashing our sacred vessels."⁶ Rasputin ran to the Empress with a very different version of this scene. The result was that both Hermogen and Illiodor were ordered to separate monasteries. Hermogen submitted but Illiodor fled, was ultimately unfrocked, and published his story of Rasputin and his activities.⁷

Perhaps Rasputin's scandalous activities would have received less publicity had not some letters from the Empress to Rasputin fallen into the hands of Duma officials. The ensuing uproar was so great that the press took up a campaign against him, and Rodzianko, President of the Duma, gained an audience with Nicholas to warn him and beg him to end his relationship with this charlatan. Nicholas reluctantly allowed Rodzianko to investigate the matter, but when Rodzianko acquired the letters and asked for another interview he was refused. Only Kokovtsov's intervention saved Rodzianko from resigning. The Minister of the Interior, Makarov, handed the letters to the Emperor personally, against Kokovtsov's warning that it would end his career as minister. It did, with the subsequent order from Nicholas that new measures be taken to control the press which was now reporting this new scandal.⁸

⁶Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 146.

⁷Ibid.; Kokovtsov, p. 293; Paléologue, I, 145-46.

⁸Kokovtsov, pp. 290-96, 300; Paléologue, I, 146.

In June of 1914, the eve of the outbreak of World War I, Rasputin lay near death in his native village of Pokrovskoe. He had been stabbed in the stomach by a prostitute, Guseva, whose lover he had been.⁹ The Empress' concern was such that she sent an outstanding surgeon from St. Petersburg to perform the necessary surgery.¹⁰ As soon as recovery allowed Rasputin to travel, he returned to St. Petersburg where he was received at the palace itself. This procedure was unusual, and on September 20, 1914, Paléologue noted in his diary:

The Emperor is on a tour of inspection to the army front. As a rule the meetings of the Empress and Rasputin take place in Madam Vyrubova's little house on the Sredniaya. But yesterday the starets was received at the palace itself and his visit lasted two hours.¹¹

Rasputin was now becoming bold enough to write suggestions to the foreign ambassadors. While most of what he wrote was a hodgepodge of gibberish, it shows the audacity of a man who would not have dared to do such, had he not felt certain that he had the support of very powerful backers. Paléologue has noted an interesting illustration. On December 3, 1914 he received from Rasputin an almost illegible note scrawled on a piece of paper which had been "translated" for Paléologue at the request of Anna Vyrubova. It read: "God grant that you may live after the manner

⁹Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 157-58; Paléologue, I, 78-79, 119.

¹⁰Pierre Billiard, Le tragique destin de Nicholas II et de sa famille (Paris: Payot, 1929), p. 78.

¹¹Paléologue, p. 133.

of Russia, and not of the critics of the country, the cipher for example."

The deliverer of the note had placed an asterik after the word "cipher" with the following explanation: "Madame Vyrubova thinks this means that Russia should not be blamed for her monarchical principle." Rasputin's note continued:

From that moment God will give you the miracle of strength. Your armies will see the strength of heaven. Victory is with you and on you!

This nonsense would not have especially interested or disturbed the French Ambassador had it not been written on stationery from the imperial palace with the coat of arms in the corner carelessly torn off. He anxiously replied, therefore, with a vague statement concerning France's loyalty to Russia. He received word the next day that his reply had reached "august hands" and that the order to deliver the original note had come from "high up."¹²

Already the Empress was taking Rasputin's words as directives from heaven. Although the official dispatches from the war front satisfied her, she sought from the Rasputin the assurance that she desired. She wrote to her husband:

I don't listen to the gossip of town which makes one otherwise quite nervous, but only believe what Nikolasha [Grand Duke Nicolas] lets know, nevertheless, I begged A[ana] to wire

¹²Paléologue, I, 180.

our friend that things are very serious and we beg for his prayers.¹³

In January of 1915 Anna Vyrubova was seriously injured in a railway accident. She was taken to the Empress' military hospital in St. Petersburg, and Alexandra rushed to her side. Anna recovered as the doctors predicted, but as a precautionary measure the Empress sent a special train to bring Rasputin to Anna's bedside.¹⁴

A few days later Rasputin was run down by a troika on the Nevsky Prospekt but escaped serious injury. Never to be outdone, Rasputin described the injuries to Anna and his near escape as divinely inspired. This was not to imply, however, that God was disturbed with them personally--on the contrary! Its meaning was that God was more than ever unhappy with the war.¹⁵

¹³Pares, Letters of Tsaritas, November 24, 1914, p. 30.

¹⁴Paléologue, I, 256.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 260.

VIII

RASPUTIN AND THE WAR

In February 1915 the lack of ammunition and equipment that had plagued the Russian army from the beginning of the war reached crisis proportions. This crisis was reflected mainly in the form of retreat, and it was now that Rasputin began a program of revenge against one of his former followers.

The Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich was Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army. He had earned the Empress' disfavor in 1905 with his refusal to acquiesce in the Tsar's request that he head a police state in Russia as an answer to the revolutionary movement. The Grand Duke refused this request in a most dramatic scene, and the Empress ever afterwards held him responsible for the establishment of the Duma.¹

In 1906 the Grand Duke had been a warm patron of Rasputin for only a short time. He soon saw through Rasputin's facade, and begged the Tsar to send Rasputin away. Nicholas refused to do this, but as the Grand Duke's requests were not to be turned from lightly, Nicholas would have complied had it not been for Alexandra's intervention. Rasputin thus regarded him as one of his most formidable enemies.

As the spring of 1915 approached and retreat followed retreat, Rasputin began railing against the Grand Duke. He was clever enough

¹Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 368.

not to criticize him for retreating, however. As with any people at war, unpopularity over retreat itself would come in due course. What Rasputin then insisted was that the Grand Duke had been using hypocritical methods to win popularity with the army and thus gain a personal following. Rasputin claimed that the need to retreat was God's punishment to a man trying to betray his sovereign. This was the beginning of the end for the Grand Duke as supreme commander.²

Under this increased criticism about the Grand Duke from the Tsar's immediate circle, the Emperor decided to visit the front. There is no evidence to prove that Nicholas undertook this visit with the intention of removing the Grand Duke. Evidence of the Tsar's apprehension about finding headquarters openly hostile to him, however, can be discerned from the lines of the Empress' letter to him following his departure:

The Stavka [Headquarters] is not the thing---
You are for the troops, when and where possible--&
our Friend's blessing & prayers will help.

Such a comfort for me that you saw Him & were blessed by Him this evening.³

In another letter we read not only further insinuations against the Grand Duke, but an inadvertent admission that Rasputin was being advised of the correspondence between the sovereigns and the Grand Duke at the front. While admonishing her husband for not being forceful enough, Alexandra wrote:

Though Nikolasha is so highly placed, yet you are above

²Paléologue, I, 285-86.

³Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, February 27, 1915, p. 50.

him. The same thing shocked our Friend, as me too, that Nikolasha words his telegrams, answers to governors, etc. in your style-- his ought to be more simple and humble and other things.⁴

In March of 1915 those close to the Tsar began to feel that he was growing increasingly anxious about his standing with the army. Generally, this anxiety showed in his small references to the war effort at the front.⁵ To further aggravate the matter, the Grand Duke and his staff accompanied the Tsar on another visit to the front in late April of that year. Everyone was struck by the coldness of the troops and the staff to the Tsar. This visit, however, had followed one of Rasputin's particularly talked about scandals, and the ffigid attitude of all concerned was a result of the scandal, rather than the Grand Duke's popularity over that of the Tsar's. As the Tsar was unaware of the actual reason for his poor reception, he took it as proof positive of the Grand Duke's growing popularity over his own, and Rasputin lost no time in capitalizing on this misunderstanding. The starets accused the generals of using the war as a tool to gain personal prestige and wealth,⁶ and the Empress chimed in with sighs of regret that the Grand Duke had turned from God by rejecting Rasputin:

Would to God N. [Grand Duke Nicholas] were another man & had not turned against a man of Gods, that always brings bad luck to their work.⁷

A few weeks later, in a most candid statement, she summed up the problem neatly by writing: "Nikolasha knows my will, & fears

⁴Ibid., April 4, 1915, p. 62.

⁵Paléologue, I, 298.

⁶Ibid., pp. 333-34, 341.

⁷Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, June 12, 1915, p. 89.

my influence (guided by Gregory) upon you; its all so clear."⁸

It was also becoming very clear to the populace in general. During the summer of 1915 demonstrations were held in the capital against the bad effects of the war effort and the imperial couple's association with Rasputin. In respect of those circumstances and in order that his name might not be brought up at the imminent opening of the Duma, the Tsar ordered Rasputin to leave the capital for a time. Nicholas further made some changes in the administration to please Duma pressure groups, and in so doing several of Rasputin's circle lost their offices. Rasputin was furious. The French ambassador reports that Rasputin reminded the Empress that harm would come to the Tsarevich if he were not there to protect the crown prince.⁹ The Empress promised to recall Rasputin as soon as the Duma session was ended.¹⁰

The above took place in mid-July of 1915. Apparently the Empress accepted Rasputin's warnings at face value for on Sunday, August 22, 1915 Paléologue reported in his diary:

Rasputin has not stayed long in his Siberian village. He has been back three days and has already had several long talks with the Empress.

The Emperor is [visiting] at the front.¹¹

The last great scene in this imperial tragedy was about to begin.

⁸Ibid., June 25, 1915, p. 111.

⁹Paléologue, II, 35-36. Paléologue offers no clue as to how he received this information.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 54.

IX

THE TSAR WITH THE ARMY

Rasputin had been back in the capital for only a few days when the Tsar announced his decision. He would personally assume the command of the Russian army and reside at General Headquarters. The Grand Duke was relieved of his functions as Generalissimo, and General Alexeev was made Chief-of-Staff.¹

The official reasons for this change did not, of course, mention the underlying cross-currents which brought it about. The Grand Duke was made Lieutenant-Governor of the Caucasus, a post not without distinction. But no one doubts the genuine reasons for his dismissal. Outstanding among them was his opposition to Rasputin, who had now convinced their majesties that the Grand Duke's ultimate design was to gain such popularity with the army that he could take over the throne.²

We have evidence that Rasputin was an important factor in the Tsar's decision to assume command. A year later, while taking leave of the Tsar at his headquarters, Alexandra wrote:

If only Alexeiev [General Alexeev] has taken our Friend's image in the right spirit, then God is sure to bless his work with you. Don't fear to mention Gregory's name to him -----thanks to Him that you remained firm & took over the commandment a year ago, when all were against you.³

¹Paléologue, II, 57.

²Ibid., pp. 57-59.

³Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, August 3, 1916, p. 378.

The news that Nicholas had decided to assume the supreme command directly at the front was deplorable to all responsible persons. Sensing Rasputin's role in it, the press opened up a new attack upon the starets, taking care this time not to mention the imperial couple directly. There seemed no doubt that this latest move was inspired by Rasputin.⁴ The General Assembly of the "Industrial and Commercial Society of Moscow" went so far as to pass a motion stating "it is necessary at once to place in power men enjoying public confidence, and give them a completely free hand."⁵

The Tsar was not unaware that his assumption of the command would meet with some objections. Nicholas' temperament was such, however, that he was apt to act first and weigh later, as it was only after his decision to assume the command that he sought the opinions of those representatives of governments with whom he was allied in war. He dispatched Anna Vyrubova to gain the French Ambassador's view on his new decision. "Tell me what you think of it. His Majesty himself has commissioned me to ask you," she said.⁶ Pointing out to her that any objections were too late, Paléologue gave her a nebulous answer, sending his best wishes to the Tsar.⁷

⁴Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 265; Paléologue, II, 61; "Rodzianko's Letter to the Tsar," Documents of Russian History, 1914-1917, Frank Alfred Golder (ed.), (New York: The Century Company, 1927), I, 208-10.

⁵Paléologue, II, 63.

⁶Ibid., p. 64.

⁷Ibid.

Just before he left for the front, Nicholas did one last surprising and disconcerting act. He dismissed Prince Vladimir Orlov as director of his military household. A personal friend of the Tsar for twenty years, his duties had given him daily contact with the sovereigns' private lives. His dismissal was, as usual, the result of his integrity. He had voiced consistent disapproval of Rasputin.⁸ "Henceforth," wrote Paléologue, "there will be no one in their majesties' entourage who will or can resist the starets."⁹

The winter of 1915-1916 only proved Paléologue's observation correct. The first incident of major significance was a change of the President of the Council of Ministers from Goremykin to Sturmer. There is no question that Goremykin was too advanced in age for the position: he was eighty-seven. What is important is that he was replaced by Boris Sturmer, a notorious member of the Russian bureaucracy whose total inexperience for the position, as well as his dishonesty, was overlooked (or unknown) by the Empress because he held Rasputin's favor.¹⁰ "Sturmer would do for a bit," wrote the Empress to her husband. She pointed out that if Nicholas were later to discover that he was unsatisfactory, Sturmer could always be changed. For the time, however, he seemed the only choice as "he very much values Gregory wh. is a great thing."¹¹

⁸Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 268; Paléologue, II, 73-74.

⁹Paléologue, II, 69.

¹⁰Florinsky, pp. 88-89; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 307.

¹¹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, January 7, 1916, p. 256.

Almost simultaneously the elevation of Pitirim to the Metropolitan See of Petrograd [formerly St. Petersburg] virtually made Rasputin the master of the Russian Church. Alexandra had written earlier in the year to Nicholas concerning Pitirim's nomination: "Darling, I forgot to speak about Pitirim, the Metropolitan of Georgia." Alexandra wrote that she was sending some newspaper clippings to indicate how beloved Pitirim was in the Caucasus. From her letter it appears that neither she nor the Tsar knew anything about him. "Shows that he is a worthy man," she wrote, "and a great Worshipper, as our Friend says."¹²

Alexandra warned Nicholas that Rasputin had told her that Pitirim's nomination would find opposition from Volzhin, the Procurator of the Holy Synod. The Empress insisted that Nicholas was not to be dissuaded, however, as Rasputin could see no one else for the position at that time:

He foresees Volzhin's fright & that he will try to dissuade you, but begs you to be firm, as he is the only suitable man. To replace him he has nobody to recommend, unless the one who was at Bielovezh, I suppose that's the Grodno one?¹³

Nicholas voiced no objections, and after a discreet lapse of several weeks Pitirim was given the coveted See.¹⁴

Hardly had the new Metropolitan assumed his office than he pressured the Tsar for an immediate audience to hear

¹²Ibid., November 12, 1915, p. 218.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 303-04.

his new "improvements." It is difficult not to conjecture how many of Rasputin's enemies in clerical circles would be effected by these new changes. Wrote the Empress:

I hope you don't mind that I wired about Pitirim, but he wd. so much like to see you quietly (here you never have time) and tell you all his ideas & improvements he wd. like to make.¹⁵

As the Empress rambled on, Pitirim's intimacy with the Rasputin circle was evident. Anna Vyrubova had been ill with a cold, and Pitirim was losing no time impressing this most important person: "He sat near Ania's bed yesterday. Kind man."¹⁶ Nicholas was only too glad to see Pitirim immediately, as he wired the reply: "Pitirim is coming tomorrow."¹⁷

We do not know what Pitirim recommended to the Tsar, or whether or not those particular recommendations were acceptable. What is important is that Pitirim's post was the most important one in the Russian Church, and Rasputin had now closed ranks with the most influential church officer in Russia.

¹⁵ Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, January 10, 1916, p. 261

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, January 11, 1916, p. 135.

'WALL IN THE REAR'

After August of 1916, less than six months before the monarchy fell, we can most clearly pinpoint Rasputin's influence upon the affairs of state. At that time the Tsar was away from the capital, and realizing the impossibility of the task he had set for himself, he had willingly delegated much of the interior affairs of the nation to the Empress. It was then that Alexandra's letters reveal to us her direct reliance on Rasputin for advice, and that Nicholas was aware that the most important secrets of state would be known to him. Nicholas was also well aware of the influence that this man would exert upon the Empress.

The "surrender" of authority to Alexandra for affairs governing internal events can be followed from the imperial couple's correspondence after the first week of September 1916. At that time Alexandra had accompanied her husband on his return to headquarters, so that she might supervise accommodations for the Tsarevitch who was to visit an extended time with his father.

As she left to return to the capital, she left Nicholas a letter in which she asked him to permit her to share his work:

Could I but help you more--I pray so hard for God to give me wisdom & understanding so as to be a real help for you in every way: & to advise you always rightly. ---I fully trust in our Friends wisdom endowed by God, to council what is right for you & our country---He sees far ahead and therefore his judgment can be relied upon.¹

¹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 4, 1916, p. 390.

And again a few days later:

Bless you, Lovebird, God give me strength to be yr. help & find the right words to give over everything rightly & to persuade you as our Friend & God would wish.²

As the days progressed Alexandra's belief that Rasputin truly had possibilities in redeeming a war torn Russia became more evident, as she wrote: "Was twice at our Friend's, I am pleased to say. Perhaps you will be able to find him some work to do for you?"³

The Tsar wrote nothing to these suggestions. He had only recently returned to the front and the major problems concerned the military and not the interior. This situation was not to last, however. The next day he wrote to his wife: "Together with military matters, the eternal question of supplies troubles me most of all." Nicholas wrote that General Alexeev had received a letter from the President of the Committee of Supplies and that he was now deeply troubled. Administrative offices seemed unable to satisfy demands, prices were soaring, and with the advent of the fall and winter seasons, starvation would be the result.

I do not see any other way out, except by transferring the matter to the military authorities, but that also has its disadvantages! It is the most damnable problem I have ever come across! I never was a businessman and simply do not understand anything in these questions of supplying

²Ibid., September 7, 1916, p. 394.

³Ibid., September 19, 1916, pp. 402-03.

and provisioning.⁴

After twenty-two years as Tsar, and now as military Commander-in-Chief, Nicholas still had not grasped even the basics of production and supply. Alexandra, who would in candor have admitted that she knew even less, nevertheless decided that she knew where to find answers. She took the problem directly to Rasputin.

I'll ask our Fr.'s advice.--So often He has sound ideas others go by--God inspires Him--& to-morrow I'll write what He said. His being here makes me quieter, says things will go better--people less persecute Him, whenever they are more after Him everything goes worse.⁵

Alexandra's new experience as independent spokesman for the Tsar was filling her with new confidence. It was obvious that she was at last enjoying her role as "Empress."

I am no longer the slightest bit shy or affraid of the ministers & speak like a waterfall in Russia!!! And they kindly don't laugh at my faults. They see I am energetic & tell all to you I hear & see & that I am yr. wall in the rear wh. is a very firm one & with God's mercy I hope I may be of some wee use to you.⁶

The Empress pointed out that ministers were coming to lean on her for advice, and she felt strongly that it was her intervention that was responsible for their cooperation with each other. Being generous of spirit she must give credit where it is due, however. Rasputin gets his share of praise: "I am obstinate & over & over repeat the same thing & our Friend helps with advice (may they continue listening to Him)."

⁴Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 20, 1916, p. 266.

⁵Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 21, 1916, p. 407.

⁶Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 22, 1916, p. 409.

In the same vein she continued:

Lovy, all thats in my power I shall do to help you--sometimes a woman can, when men a wee bit look up to her--these know they have me to comit with as yr. guard, eye & ear in the rear.⁷

The Tsar was apparently delighted with the above letter:

Yes, truly you ought to be my eyes and ears there in the capital, while I have to stay here. It rests with you to keep peace and harmony among the ministers--thereby you do a great service to me and to our country.

Did Nicholas realize that to write the above was, in fact, comparable to a mandate allowing his wife to sit in judgment on basic decisions affecting the whole of Russia's internal system? His next sentences speak for themselves:

Oh, my precious Sunny, I am so happy to think that you have found at last a worthy occupation! Now I shall naturally be calm, and at least not worry over internal affairs.⁸

The surrender of command for the internal affairs of the nation to Alexandra was to have far reaching effects. The establishment of the cabinet in Russia was, in the long run, to create more problems than it solved, for there never was a clear division of duties between the cabinet and that of the military. Sometimes, in fact, during war time, the military had the right to issue orders to the civilian government without recourse to agreement with cabinet officials whose jurisdiction generally applied there. In such a case the military had the right to dismiss all officials of the government in areas to which the military's

⁷Ibid.

⁸Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 23, 1916, p. 269

authority extended. The officials affected by these dismissals were all members of the civilian administration, whether of the central government or that of the local municipalities.⁹ Only the Emperor could override the orders published by the military in cases like this.

Nicholas had spent twenty years avoiding the troublesome questions of the internal needs of Russia. With war to take him to the front, the ubiquitous problems of internal administration at the capital seemed too far distant to worry over during the needs of war time. It therefore fell to Alexandra to decide many of these troublesome issues. This she did, as will be seen in following chapters, and guided by Rasputin, the Empress brought her influence upon the Tsar to change ministers. With these new ministers who were willing to do her bidding, she and Rasputin set about to force the military to bend to her wishes, supported by the commands of the Emperor.

⁹Florinsky, p. 72.

XI

PROTOPOPOV'S NOMINATION

During war time the position of Minister of the Interior was always a serious consideration. Not only did this post carry the responsibility for supplying the war effort in general, but also for the material well-being of the civilian population. Of the myriad items needed by any population for domestic and defense purposes, the Minister of the Interior had direct voice in deciding who received contracts for the raw materials, manufacturing and deliveries of these goods. These contracts, of course, often involved millions of rubles in profits to those directly involved.

Rasputin's activities in this sphere of domestic policy were not new, and the advantages to him and his circle are obvious. A. N. Khvostov, a successful Rasputin candidate for that same position earlier, admitted that while he was in office Rasputin was asked by the prominent banker, D. L. Rubinstein, whether or not the Russian army would soon advance. The banker desired this information so that he might determine whether or not an investment in a large tract of timber would be a valuable project at that time. According to Khvostov, Rasputin did indeed go to the Tsar for this information.¹ When he entered the Tsar's study he asked

¹Rasputin never stopped trying to obtain from the Empress the dates and times of expected advances by the troops. See, for examples her letters of November 1, 1915 and June 18, 1916.

Nicholas why he looked so sad. "Scoundrels all around me!" said Nicholas. "No boots and no guns."

"But when will you advance? asked Rasputin.

"As we have no guns before two months time, that's the earliest we can advance," was the Tsar's reply.²

No sooner had Nicholas left for the front to assume the supreme command than Alexandra began an intense campaign to set just the right psychological climate for the Tsar's acceptance of Rasputin as supreme advisor. Her reasons for doing this were beyond reproach. She loved her husband dearly, and truly believed that Rasputin was God's messenger to Russia. "Your loneliness will be great," she wrote to her husband. "& so dull--no real friend near you--shall be quieter when N. P. returns again--he is one of ours blessed by our Friend to be of use to you."³

Alexandra's letters continue, always in praise of their "Friend" and his important place in their lives: "She [Anna Vyubova] showed me our Friends wire to you. He says from to-day on the news will be better."

²Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima [The Fall of the Tsarist Regime], 7 vols. (Moscow: State Publishing House, 1924-27), I, 31-32.

³Pares, Letters of Tsaritesa, September 4, 1916, pp. 390-91. N. P. [Sablin] was the favorite Aide-de-Camp of the Empress. He was appointed by the Tsar to inquire into one of Rasputin's more notorious orgies in 1915. Sablin admitted that Rasputin was drunk (as did Rasputin himself), but apparently handled the situation in such a gingerly fashion that he did not incur the Empress' wrath, as others did. The final result was that their majesties and Anna Vyubova agreed to conclude that "evil powers" had set a fearsome trap for Rasputin, and only direct intervention from heaven had saved him. Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 264; Paléologue, I, 331-33.

Apparently, Rasputin was out of the capital. We do not know for what purposes he left or what were the contents of the telegram that he sent to the Tsar. Alexandra continued to praise Rasputin's piety and insisted that the Tsar should visit a nearby monastery which contained a miraculous image. She then continued with subtle defense of her spiritual leader, probably with fresh memories of the gossip from his last scandal:

He spoke with Raiev over an hour,---says he is a real God's send & spoke so well about all Church questions & in such a spiritual way.---is sad that heaps of people write nasty letters against him, Gregory, to Alexeiev.⁴

By not admitting anything, then, the Empress knew that Rasputin was under heavy criticism. Neither those letters to Alexeiev, nor anything else, ever shook their faith in him.

On the morning of the seventh of September, 1916, Alexandra wrote her usual daily letter in which she casually mentioned that Rasputin had returned to the capital and that she would see him that evening: "Sturmer comes at 5 1/2 and I see our Friend in the evening."⁵ Contrary to her usual practice, however, she wrote another letter late that same night. Her urgency, plus the contents speak for themselves concerning the Empress' reliance on Rasputin :

Tho' I am very tired I must begin my letter this evening, so as not to forget what our Friend told me. I gave yr. message & He says not to worry, all will be right.⁶

Alexandra then presented a list of candidates for appointments, and suggestions for changes in posts already filled. Her reasons for a candidate's qualification (or rejection) invariably echoed

⁴Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 6, 1916, p. 391.

⁵Ibid., September 7, 1916, p. 393.

⁶The "message" concerned the Tsar's letter about the problem of supplies.

a refrain heard throughout the entire correspondence: that she knew little, if anything, about a candidate first-hand, but that either "he venerates our Friend," or "he does not like our Friend."

I told Him my conversation with Sturmer, who says Klimovitch [Chief of Police] must absolutely be sent away (he becomes senator) & then old Khvostov will go, as he cannot get along without him. Khvostov [Minister of Interior] is nervous & feels ill (I know he dislikes Sturmer & so does Klimovitch, who is a bad man, hates our Friend & yet comes to him pretending & cringing before him).⁷

It was then that she proposed Protopopov, at Rasputin's suggestion, for Minister of the Interior. Sturmer had suggested Prince Obolensky. Had Sturmer known better the Empress' temperament he would never have done so, for Obolensky had had the misfortune to serve with the Grand Duke Nicholas prior to his replacement by the Tsar himself, with the Empress' following reaction:

Now Sturmer wants to propose this Pr. Obolensky fr. Karsk-Kharkov (before that at the old Headquarters with Nikolasha!), now works at the food-question, to become minister of Interior, but Gregory begs you earnestly to name Protopopov there.

It is clear then that Rasputin suggested Protopopov. Had Alexandra been honest she might also have admitted that Prince Obolensky had another stigma which made him totally unacceptable. He had been the City Prefect of Petrograd and carefully watched the movements of Rasputin. It was also known to the Empress that Obolensky's wife was more hostile to Rasputin than he.⁸ Pretending

⁷Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 7, 1916, pp. 393-94.

⁸Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 386.

total ignorance of these facts, she continued:

I think you could not do better than name him. He likes our Friend since at least 4 years & that says a lot for a man--&this Obolensky is sure to be again of the other clan,-- I don't know him, but I believe in our Friend's wisdom & guidance.

Protopopov also had other qualities of interest to

Alexandra:

He happens to be one of the Duma (is not left) & so will know how to be with them. Those rotten people came together & want Rodzianko to go to you and ask you to change all the ministers & take their candidates---impertinent brutes.

In the same letter the Empress conveyed suggestions and admonitions from Rasputin which range in scope from duties of priests on the front lines to diplomacy between Russia and her allies.

Alexandra pleaded:

Do listen to Him who only wants yr. good & whom God has given more insight, wisdom & enlightenment than all the military put together. His love for you & Russia is so intense & God has sent Him to be yr. help & guide & pray so hard for you.⁹

Thus did the Empress of Russia acknowledge her debt to an illiterate "holy man" from Siberia.

The Tsar answered her immediately. He hesitated to comply with these requests. Such changes were becoming too frequent, and Nicholas also pleaded caution when dealing with candidates chosen by Rasputin. His reply recognizes Rasputin as the man behind the suggested changes, and gives us a glimpse of the Tsar's personality: a man apt to plead, rather than command.

Thank you with all my heart for your dear, long letter, in which you pass on Friend's message.

⁹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 7, 1916, p. 394.

It seems to me that this Protopopov is a good man, but he has much to do with Factories, etc. Rodzianko has for a long time suggested him for the post of Minister of Trade, instead of Shakhovskoy. I must consider this question, as it has taken me completely by surprise.

Some have alleged that Rasputin's direct pressure on the imperial couple for changes in governmental posts is pure myth. Those who do, insist that Rasputin merely capitalized on events by "blessing" situations which any one closely associated with court circles could have surmised were soon to take place. The Tsar's last statement in the above leaves no room for such an assumption. Neither he nor the Empress had considered these changes until Rasputin brought them forth. Nicholas' letter continues: "Our Friend's opinions of people are sometimes very strange, as you know yourself ---therefore one must be careful, especially with appointments to high office." Nicholas admitted that he did not know one of the men in question. His please for a careful thinking out of the situation indicate the gravity of the changes being advised:

I do not personally know this Klimovitch. Would it be wise to discharge them at the same time? That is, I mean to say, the Minister of the Interior and the Chief of Police? This must be thought out very carefully.¹⁰

While the Tsar was penning the above reply to his wife, she was in the capital penning her usual evening letter to him. Her letter of that particular day is a simple newsy note of family

¹⁰Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 9, 1916, pp. 256-57.

doings, but at the very end, after her signature, is the one direct line: "Please, take Protopopov as minister of the Interior, as he is one of the Duma, it will make a great effect amongst them & shut their mouths."¹¹

The next morning Alexandra received her husband's letter which outlined his objections. To his arguments she wrote the following reply:

Warmest thanks for your dear letter. So sorry I had to bother you about all those questions, only I wanted to prepare you. Shakhovskoy too good to be changed, & as Khvostov wants to leave & Protopopov is a suitable man, Gregory says--had to tell you --& that Pr. Obolensky would be again of the opposite clan & not a "friend."¹²

The rest of this short note deals with family news. There are no other requests of any kind. To this one request, therefore, the Tsar replied by telegram, which is now given in its entirety:

Stavka. 10 September, 1916.

Thank you with all my heart for your dear letters. It shall be done. Please tell Nastenka that I am very grieved about her mother's death. Clear, cold weather. Both [Nicholas and Tsarevitch] kiss you tenderly.

Nicky¹³

Thus the appointment of Protopopov to Minister of the Interior was effected. Only the Empress, via Gregory, had advised it, and she admittedly knew no more of the situation than that of Rasputin's recommendation. The last we hear of Nicholas' action is in a letter of a few days later which said: "God bless yr. new choice of Protopopov ---our Friend says you have done a very wise act in naming him."¹⁴

¹¹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 9, 1916, p. 395.

¹²Ibid., September 10, 1916, p. 396.

¹³Vuilliamy, Letters of Tsar, p. 258.

¹⁴Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 14, 1916, p. 398.

Commenting on the whole Protopopov incident, the French Ambassador describes him as a neurotic politician whose interests in the occult brought him to Rasputin through the direction of the notorious "Doctor Badmaiev." "A few days later," wrote Paléologue, "Gregory described Protopopov to the Empress as the God-sent saviour of Russia."¹⁵

¹⁵Paléologue, II, 51-52.

XII

THE BRUSILOV OFFENSIVE

Rasputin's wishes now came to bear directly upon military matters. The most important example of this concerns General Brussilov's offensive against the Austrian front during the summer and fall months of 1916. This officer was one of Russia's outstanding generals. He has been described as "The Russian commander who showed the greatest intellect" and whose understanding "of the psychology of the Russian soldiers in the war goes deeper than that of his military colleagues."¹ As the fall of that year approached, Brussilov had managed to put the Austrians into positive panic. Only one consideration flawed this otherwise successful venture: the losses of Russian troops. Estimated by those who directly participated, the size of the losses vary, but even conservative estimates stagger the imagination.²

Two of Brussilov's loudest critics were the Empress and Rasputin. The Empress' understanding of the problem stressed the horror of war in general; Rasputin, not unwisely, pointed to the drain on Russian man-power. Neither of them took under consideration the problems or objectives of the generals at the front. What is important here is that the Tsar, having accepted a plan from his closest military advisors, countermanded that order on the insistence of the Empress, acting at Rasputin's request.

¹Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 21.

²Ibid., pp. 366-67; Paléologue, II, 269, 284.

In late September of that year Nicholas wrote to Alexandra:

My yesterday's sense of depression has passed off. I told Alexeiev to order Broussilov to stop our hopeless attacks, so as to withdraw the Guards and part of the other troops from the front lines, give them time to rest and make up their strength. We must launch an attack near Galitch and more to the south at Dorna-Vatra, so as to help the Roumanians and cross the Carpathians before the winter sets in. The reinforcements necessary for this will be sent up.³

The Tsar was in good spirits. He reported that the fall weather was sunny and clear and that a champagne luncheon had been held to celebrate the birthday of one of his staff. Alexandra's reply to his letter shows that the Empress was now bringing matters of state routinely before Rasputin.

Our Friend says about the new orders you gave to Brussilov etc: "Very satisfied with father's orders, all will be well." He won't mention it to a soul, but I had to ask His blessing for yr. decision.⁴

On the day after Nicholas had written to his wife, he reconsidered his decision. His letter indicates that he had done so after careful consultation with his generals: "Broussilov has asked permission to continue the attack, as Gourko will help him on the right flank, and I have permitted it."⁵ Nicholas' information concerning Brussilov's continued offensive was merely intended as routine news, and not as a major change in policy. It had been included in his letter amongst a group of trivial, newsy items.

³Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 21, 1916, p. 267.

⁴Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 23, 1916, p. 411.

⁵Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 22, 1916, p. 268.

There was now a delay in mail between Tsarakov Sele and headquarters due apparently to the demands on an overburdened railway system. Sometimes this delay reached three days, and only a direct telegram could produce quicker service. For this reason the Empress did not receive the Tsar's letter of September 22 until the twenty-fourth, at which time she replied by telegram:

Lovy, our Friend is much put out that Brussilov has not listened to yr. order to stop the advance---says you were inspired from above to give that order & the crossing of the Carpathians before winter & God wld bless it.---Now he says again useless losses. --- Hopes you will insist as now all is not right.⁶

The Empress' phrasing of the first line of the above is interesting: "that Brussilov has not listened to your order" suggests a subtle impertinence on Alexandra's part. What she should have written was "that Brussilov has encouraged you to countermand your original order." As it stands, however, we discern the opinion expressed regularly within the correspondence that Alexandra realized that Nicholas was apt to be swayed by forceful personalities. In fact Brussilov's offense was not in disobedience to a command, but a straightforward approach to the Tsar to request a change.

When Nicholas received the Empress' telegram he wrote to her immediately. His intention was to explain the reasons for his reconsideration, and it is clear that he had no intention of abandoning it. Furthermore, he added that she should not discuss it with Rasputin:

⁶Paras, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 24, 1916, p. 412.

"I have only just received your telegram, in which you inform me that our Friend is very disturbed about my plan not being carried out." Nicholas explained that when he had given the order to Brussilov to stop the attack, he had not then known that General Gourko had agreed with Brussilov to combine their forces with other neighboring troops. This new combination doubled the forces at Brussilov's disposal and gave considerable promise of success.⁷ The Tsar also noted the Empress' disapproval of General Kaledin. In her telegram she had written: "It coincides what Paul said about Kaledin not being sure at all of success."⁸ Nicholas replied:

To-day Br. [Brussilov] asked permission to send General Kaledin to Lechitzky and to appoint Gourko commander over all these troops, including the Guards, which from a military point of view, is quite correct, and with which I thoroughly agree.⁹

With his mind firmly set that he had taken the right course, Nicholas added that she should not discuss these details with Rasputin:

Now I shall be calm in the assurance that G. [Gourko] will act energetically but with caution and intelligence. These details are for you only---I beg you, my dear! Tell him only: Papa prikazal priniat razoumniye mieri! [Papa has ordered to take sensible measures!]¹⁰

The next day Alexandra began her letter as usual. When she first sat down to write, she had not yet received the above letter from Nicholas explaining his reasons for persisting with Brussilov's plan.

⁷Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 21, 1916, p. 270.

⁸Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 24, 1916, p. 412.

⁹Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 24, 1916, p. 270.

¹⁰Ibid.

Oh, give your order again to Brussilov---stop this useless slaughter--the younger ones feel their chiefs have neither any faith of success there--Yr. plan so wise, approved by our Friend---Galitsch, Carpathians, Roumanians. Stick to it, you are head master & all will thank you on their knees.

Alexandra's naivété was amazing! In her effort to win Nicholas' acceptance of her desires, she overlooked that to give into Rasputin's advice instead of Brussilov's, would be to trade one "Master" for another.

Alexandra insisted that Brussilov's plan would never work. She protested that there were swamps in the area and that what high ground was available was treeless, with "open spaces, impossible to hide." We do not know from whom she received that information, but she began doubting General Kaledin once more while admitting that she knew nothing of him personally: "Sweetie, I know nothing but is Kaledin the right man in the right place, when things are difficult?"¹¹

Towards the conclusion of her letter, Alexandra received Nicholas' letter of the previous day explaining his reasons for allowing Brussilov to continue the offensive. With a sigh of resignation she accepted this decision, adding a comment on the unfortunate General Kaledin:

Fondest thanks precious letter came so nice & early, can't imagine why mine are so often late. --- Well, I am glad that Br. has sent Kal. south & given over all to Gurko, thats far the wisest thing to do---may he be reasonable & not obstinate, make him understand that clearly.¹²

This was, of course, not the end of the incident. The next day Alexandra wrote her usual letter. Her previous resigned decision to accept Brussilov's offensive was now changed. Once again she

¹¹Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 25, 1916, p. 413.

¹²Ibid., pp. 413-4.

pursued the issue with Rasputin's request, having completely ignored the Tsar's order to tell Rasputin nothing:

Our Friend worries that one did not listen to you (Brussilov) as your first thought was the right one & a pity you gave in, yr. spirit was right wishing the change. He took up the Virgin's Image & blessed you fr. far & said "May the Sun rise there". A. [Anna Vyrubova] just brought these messages from town and kisses you.¹³

On other occasions Rasputin had used such expressions as "darkness" to signify lack of understanding on someone else's part. His hope that the sun would "rise" and fill the Tsar's understanding with the error of his ways, was not far off. It "rose" the very next day!

My dear, Broussilov, has, on the receipt of my instructions, immediately given orders to stop and only asked whether it was necessary to send back the incoming troops or allow them to continue their movement.¹⁴

Nicholas accepted a compromise plan suggested by Brussilov which now, incidentally, excluded Kaledin entirely. The Empress was overjoyed to receive the news:

Just got yr. precious letter--kiss & thank over & over again for it. A. was just here, thanks & kisses tenderly.--Thanks dear for explaining about Brussilov--had not quite grasped before. In any case our Friend says to go by your ideas, your first are always the most correct.¹⁵

Brussilov's offensive was now definitely ended. The Empress' admission that she had never really understood the whole issue once again illustrates the gravity of Rasputin's influence upon her. Just as significant was the Tsar's attitude. Having agreed to a plan with his best military officers, he allowed Rasputin, through the Empress,

¹³ Ibid., September 25, 1916, p. 415.

¹⁴ Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, September 27, 1916, pp. 272-73.

¹⁵ Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, September 28, 1916, p. 418.

to change his decision.

XIII

RASPUTIN AT THE "HELM"

As the war effort at the front took increasingly more of the Tsar's attention, his concern with internal affairs became correspondingly less. He willingly let the Empress handle these details at the capital, and from the time of Protopopov's nomination until Rasputin's death in December of that year, the starets was virtually in command at the capital.

Serious difficulties for the Empress' political circle were just about to begin, however. The Russian nation, from its intellectuals to its peasants, now was thoroughly tired of the war. The demands of the war had made the most ordinary items scarce, and with winter just weeks away, the country began to experience a general feeling of alarm that starvation was imminent if serious considerations were not immediately given to the appropriation and distribution of supplies. The means by which the nation might feel reassured on this problem, was, in itself, the major issue. Only the government could possibly solve this crisis, yet the power structure of Russia was such that two elements of Russian government were thoroughly antagonistic to one another. The Council of Ministers was appointed by the sovereign, and the Duma was supposedly representative of the nation. Though this, in theory, need not have produced antagonisms, the national awareness of the Rasputin clique surrounding the Empress lent to the Russian people a feeling of the gloomiest foreboding. The nation had lost confidence in its

sovereigns with the thought that their majesties could not, or would not, support the needs of the people as a whole.¹

Of the ministers most likely to fall under attack, A. D. Protopopov was outstanding. His appointment to the position of Minister of the Interior was purely on the recommendation of Rasputin, as has been noted in a previous chapter. As a man, Protopopov had few admirable qualities. He had a mediocre business career as a director of a large cloth factory which he had inherited from his father. He did seem to have some talents as an organiser, but only on problems of very limited scope. He was elected to the Duma, and was actually chosen Vice-President, posing as a moderate Liberal. Protopopov played strictly for popularity, however, and inevitably he made enemies within the Duma. He also suffered from ill health, presumably a mental condition, for which he sought treatment from the notorious Dr. Badmayev. Badmayev was a mystic and a close associate of Rasputin's. It was through Protopopov's association with Badmayev that he was introduced to Rasputin.² We have already seen that he was a Rasputin man before his introduction to the Empress who pressed this man's appointment to the Ministry of the Interior at Rasputin's request.

Protopopov was thoroughly aware of the Duma's hostility towards him. As the question of food and domestic supplies was to be the central item of business at the next Duma session, Protopopov decided that he would assuage feelings of hostility by suggesting a compromise plan. He wrote to the Tsar suggesting

¹Florinsky, p. 134; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, pp. 384-85.

²Florinsky, p. 91; Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 378.

that the Minister of the Interior be only one of a three-man committee to decide questions concerning provisioning the nation. For this plan, he had received the approval of Sturmer, the President of the Council of Ministers (who was also another Rasputin appointment).

Hardly had his written draft of the proposal reached the mails, however, than Rasputin heard of it through the Empress. His anger at Protopopov and Sturmer for this attempted surrender of power knew no bounds, and immediately both were cowed under his derision. They therefore composed a new plan under his direction. It was brought to the Empress who wrote to her husband:

Forgive me for what I have done---but I had to---- our Friend said it was absolutely necessary. Protopopov is in despair he gave you that paper the other day, thought he was acting rightly until Gr. [Rasputin] told him it was quite wrong. So I spoke to Sturmer yesterday & they both completely believe in our Friend's wonderful God sent wisdom.³

Rasputin was now receiving complete acquiescence to his demands. This incident was considered so important by the Empress that she took the rare opportunity of sending it by courier. Her letter continued:

St. [Sturmer] sends you by this messenger a new paper to sign giving over the whole food supply now at once to the minister of Interior. St. begs you to sign it & at once return it with the train 4 1/2, then it will come in time before the Duma assembles on Tuesday.⁴

Alexandra pleaded nothing of logic in this move, only that Rasputin had recommended it. In her effort to make it more acceptable, she pointed out that the Duma would really prefer to have it "in one hand," anyway. But in pleading for Rasputin's

³Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, October 30, 1916, p. 428.

⁴Ibid.

plan she overlooked the Duma's hostility to Protopopov:

Trusting our Fr. He will help Protop. & St. quite agrees. Forgive me, but I had to take this responsibility upon myself for your sweet sake. The Duma wld. insist upon it being in one hand & not 3 hands, so better you give it straight beforehand to Protopopov. God will bless this choice.⁵

In the following lines Alexandra inadvertently summed up the whole problem between the Russian crown and its representative assembly. The Duma represented the Russian populace, yet the monarchy selected the ministers who were directly responsible for all items of major policy. If the protests of the Duma became too loud, the monarch could always dismiss it, and Alexandra mentions this possibility to her husband with the passing ease of a mistress dismissing a servant:

It will be a rotten Duma---but one must not fear---if too vile, one closes it. Its war with them & we must be firm. Tell me, you are not angry---but those men listen to me & when guided by our Friend---it must be right. They, Pr. & St. bow before His wisdom.⁶

Alexandra's complete lack of sensitivity to the fears that motivated the Duma's hostilities is surprising for one raised in the traditions of Victorian England. She saw only the erosion of the autocrat's power at the hands of the representative assembly, and feared for the future of her son's reign, as well as their own. Writing to her husband the following day, she reminded Nicholas of this: "I feel cruel worrying you, my sweet, patient Angel-- but all my trust lies in our Friend, who only thinks of you, Baby & Russia." Her next sentences not only plead for Nicholas to always

⁵Ibid., p. 429.

⁶Ibid.

trust Rasputin's "Wisdom," but are a poignant demonstration of a totally ignorant captain about to lead a ship to ruin:

And guided by Him we shall therefore get through this heavy time. It will be hard fighting, but a Man of God's is near to guard yr. boat safely through the reefs-- & little Sunny is standing as a rock behind you, firm & unwavering with decision, faith & love to fight for her darlings & our country.⁷

Nicholas was not the least bit disturbed by Rasputin's influence upon these new events. So as to reassure his wife he replied:

I have read and re-read your dear letter many times-- especially that part in which you tell of your conversation with St. and Protop. There is nothing to forgive you for, on the contrary, I must be deeply grateful to you for so far advancing this serious matter by your help.⁸

The paragraph immediately following is amazing. Rasputin's influence with the Tsar was so strong that Nicholas must have instructed his staff to accept telegrams from him, as it must be understood that only the most select materials in the multitude of correspondence sent to a sovereign is ever selected by his secretary for consideration:

Now I understand Gr.'s telegram⁹ which I received in Kiev and sent on to you yesterday. But I could not write the necessary words, not having the Minister's paper before my eyes.¹⁰

Nicholas knew that the Duma would receive the new Minister of the Interior with complete hostility. "Now it is done," he wrote, "though I am fully conscious of the great difficulties which are awaiting us for the first two months."¹¹ Like Alexandra, Nicholas looked upon

⁷Ibid., October 31, 1916, pp. 429-30.

⁸Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, November 1, 1916, p. 289.

⁹There is no copy of Rasputin's telegram and we are left no clue of its contents.

¹⁰Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, November 1, 1916, p. 289.

¹¹Ibid.

his representative body as a mere nuisance. He saw nothing in it of that expression of a people far more politically mature than he realized. "Yes, let us be firm and wait!" he wrote.¹² Unfortunately for the sovereigns, the nation was not about to view the crisis with the same philosophical detachment.

¹²Ibid.

XIV

THE DEATH OF RASPUTIN

The climax of public sentiment against Rasputin was Miliukov's speech to the Duma of November 1, 1916. Amidst prolonged and general applause he referred to the whole Rasputin circle as bringing Russia to the verge of ruin.¹ Alexandra's reaction to the above was mere indignation. "Let them [sic] scream," she wrote to Nicholas. "We must show we have no fear & are firm."² Others, however, did not share this view, and two of Russia's most outstanding noblemen decided to bring this dangerous situation to a conclusion.

The actual details of Rasputin's murder, the elaborate arrangements preceding the act and the murder itself, have captured the public imagination as no other incident within the Rasputin drama. It has been the subject of films and theatre. The act itself was carried out by two members of Russia's most influential royal families,³ and that fact is important in itself as it indicates how seriously those close to the throne regarded the influence of the starets.

Prince Felix Youssouppoff was a descendent of one of Russia's oldest noble families. His enormous wealth, plus his marriage to

¹Kokovtsov, pp. 474-75; Florinsky, pp. 107-08.

²Pares, Letters of Tsaritas, November 4, 1916, pp. 433-34.

³There were four men directly involved: Prince Felix Youssouppoff, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, V. M. Pudshkevitch--a conservative member of the Duma, and Dr. Lazavert, a close friend of Youssouppoff's who prepared poison for the unsuspecting Rasputin. Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 402; Gilliard, pp. 149-150.

one of the Tsar's nieces,⁴ gave him an influential position in Russian society and at the court. The Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, the second member of the party mentioned above, was especially close to the imperial family, and both the Emperor and Empress regarded him with deep affection. Youssouppoff claims that he had planned to kill Rasputin since early 1915, when he became disgusted with the whole scandalous situation in general. Whether or not this is true is uncertain, but his activities in trying to get Rasputin removed from his exalted position are undeniable. It was he who arranged a meeting between Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, and the Dowager Empress in an attempt to have the former Empress influence her son to remove the statets.⁵

The murder took place in the early morning hours of December 17, 1916, in the basement of Youssouppoff's house. As one looks over the evidence concerning this deed it is difficult not to assume that those involved had nothing more in mind than delivering their nation and the monarchy from what they considered a scourge. It is possible, as some have suggested, that these men realized that their act assured them a place in history. With due respect to this hypothesis, no one can fail to be impressed that they did this with full conviction that the elimination of Rasputin would save

⁴Irena, daughter of the Emperor's sister, Xenia.

⁵Pares, Fall of Monarchy, p. 147.

the monarchy, and yet that the monarch would show them great hostility, even imprisonment. The Empress was shocked, and wrote to the Tsar:

We are sitting together---can imagine our feelings---thoughts---our Friend has disappeared. Yesterday A. saw him & he said Felix asked him to come in the night, a motor wld. fetch him to see Irina.---A motor fetched him (military one) with 2 civilians & he went away.⁶

From the order in which all the information is distributed throughout the letter, Alexandra wrote continuously throughout the day, rather than in one sitting. As pieces of the story flowed in from all over the capital, the Empress grew more and more alarmed:

This night big scandal at Yussupov's house---big meeting, Dmitri, Purishkevitch, etc. all drunk, Police heard shots, Purishkevitch ran out screaming to the police that our Friend was killed.⁷

Her anxiety was now pushing hysteria, and we can conclude from her orders to the police that only near hysteria would cause her to do what she did: she broke one of the highest traditions of the Russian noble code by ordering Maximovitch, a high police official, to confine Youssoupoff and Dmitri to house arrest. By tradition, only an Emperor could do this. The whole body of Grand Dukes in the capital were immediately infuriated by this outrageous act.⁸ "Chief of Police has sent for Dmitri," she wrote. "Felix wished to leave to-night for Crimea, but [I] begged Kalinin to stop him."

And further down in the same vein:

I still trust in God's mercy that one has only driven Him off somewhere. I cannot & won't believe He has been killed. God have mercy. Such utter anguish (am calm & can't believe it).⁹

⁶Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, December 17, 1916, p. 461.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 462.

⁹Ibid.

Alexandra asked Nicholas to return to the capital immediately. The whole incident had so stricken her with terror that she feared an attempt might now be made on Anna Vyrubova's life: 'Shall keep her to live here---as now they will get at her next. Come quickly---- nobody will dare to touch her or do anything when you are here.'¹⁰

The Tsar's reaction was hardly less emotional. By telegram he replied:

I have only just read your letter. Am horrified and shaken. Am arriving to-morrow at 5 o'clock.¹¹

No sooner had the earliest details of the murder reached the general public than the wildest rumors broke out. Stories of all manner of intrigues and imminent disasters were heard. Of those who have left us a description of this public reaction, all support a mood of general rejoicing that something evil had passed from their midst.¹²

These reactions grew all the louder when it was learned what had happened to the assassins of Rasputin. Both Dmitri and Youssouppoff were banished from the capital, the former to the war front in Persia, the latter to Kurch province. Purishkevitch was allowed to remain free for fear that the sympathy showed to him by Duma members would precipitate a crisis.¹³

Sixteen members of the Imperial family got together and wrote

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, December 18, 1916, p. 312.

¹²Princess Marie, p. 250; Paléologue, III, 135; Kokovtsov, p. 477.

¹³"Iz dnevnika A. V. Romanova za 1916-1917 gg." [From the diary of A. V. Romanov for the years 1916-1917] Krasnyi Arkhiv, XXVI (1928), 188-89; Paléologue, III, 141-48.

a letter to the Tsar. They begged him to consider Dmitri's youth, his very high affection for them, and their's for him. The letter contained an outline of conditions at the Persian front (the worst imaginable) and it was felt that this action was tantamount to sending Dmitri to his death.¹⁴

This petition was not only of no avail, but surprising in the rapidity by which it was refused. In the margin Nicholas had written a few dry, brief remarks, beginning with: "No one has the right to commit murder." The Tsar felt certain that Rasputin's murder was the result of more than the named assassins: "I know that the consciences of many will know no rest, as there's more than Dmitry Pavlovich involved in this." He ended with the simple remark, "I am astonished at your petition to me."¹⁵

The Tsar's attitude to the assassins, though not without some justification, signified again the excessive devotion of the sovereigns to Rasputin's memory. It was felt that such a harsh action on the Emperor's part would not have occurred had it not been for the Empress' insistence. Their attitude only served to confirm the worst rumors of his influence.¹⁶

¹⁴Princess Marie, pp. 266-67; "Iz dnevnika A. V. Romanova za 1916-1917 gg," Ibid., 191-92.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Princess Marie, p. 267.

CONCLUSION

The revolution was now only weeks away. With an army on the brink of mutiny and most of his population sick of war and desperately hungry, Nicholas was unknowingly spending his last days as Tsar at Tsarskoe Selo.¹ When he returned to the front it is doubtful if he had any awareness of what was soon to take place. Just three days before he received Rodzianko's historic telegram telling him of the outbreak of the revolution, Nicholas wrote to his wife that he was thinking of taking up "dominoes again in my spare time."²

It has been traditional to conclude that both Alexandra and Nicholas were the victims of strange occult powers in the person of Rasputin, whose very ability to gain such an exalted position is proof of the contention.

A good deal of this stress on the occult is a direct result of written materials left to us by former members of Russia's aristocracy. Nothing throughout the Rasputin story is more vivid than the political immaturity of this element of Russian society. Forced to flee Russia because of the revolution, they came to live among western societies, especially North America, whose reading public still tended to hold aristocracy in awe. To accuse Russia of having

¹The Tsar's residence outside St. Petersburg.

²Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, February 23, 1917, p. 313. Readers may note that Rodzianko's telegram from most sources is dated March 11, 1917. The discrepancy is due to the difference between the western calendar and the calendar used by Russia at that time, which was thirteen days behind the western one.

fallen through the ineptitude of their privileged group was unthinkable. It was simpler to accuse the Devil in all his sinister glory.

Those who have chosen to be more critical in their judgment point to a system of autocratic government which was inevitably bound to failure in Russia. The vast changes which always accompany industrialization were too large for a system that was better suited to the agricultural Middle Ages.

There were, of course, many in Russia who realized this. The French Ambassador wrote that during a private dinner with the great industrialist, Putilov, he listened while Putilov casually predicted the end of Tsarism as an institution in Russia.³

The attempt to credit Alexandra herself for bringing about that end is misleading. To be sure her concept of her role as Empress helped to heighten that process. Her association with the court of Queen Victoria was apparently superficial, for she gained from that experience none of the English genius for combining democracy with monarchy. She retained instead the social attitudes which are generally lumped under "middle class"; and in a nation like Russia which had come to expect pomp and display as an integral characteristic of their sovereigns' lives, Alexandra's aloofness and social inactivity was regarded as an indication of her dislike for them. Her concept of monarchy's relationship with subjects was like that of a fairy-tale kingdom: the subjects should listen in quiet awe while the kindly king speaks in fatherly wisdom from his bejeweled throne.

³Paléologue, I, 348-50.

None of this suited the temper of the times. Alexandra learned too late that the kindly king speaking from his regal throne was apt to be met by an assassin's bomb; that her desire to turn the palace into the Emperor's private "house" free from the public's curiosity was sheer folly, for the primary function of a great palace is that of a show-place. Her answer to all this was to draw into herself, and it was then that Russia's mystical faith came to have a special fascination for her. Neither she nor Nicholas was personally strong. Like so many others in their time, they greatly admired the quiet strength of the peasant who seemed capable of surviving the greatest disasters. When Rasputin appeared, he seemed to fulfill all these promises. Dirty, ragged and forceful of personality, he seemed to be the very soul of rural Russia.

The sovereigns indulgence in the occult cannot be said to have come from Rasputin's influence alone. We must remember those who preceded him, Philippe and Kolyaba, to mention only two we know.

As a matter of fact, the sense of power and security which the imperial couple believed came from their relationship with Rasputin was actually in their own minds. Rasputin was as much a victim of circumstances as was his sovereigns. For almost no one bothers to mention that Rasputin really believed in himself, as he could never have survived the vicissitudes of a starets in his early years. had he not felt a strong conviction. When he was elevated to a position of

"heavenly messenger" by St. Petersburg society, his peasant background with its correspondingly limited perspective could not allow him to believe that such flattering consideration from Russia's highest circles was not indicative of something valid within his ideas.

Alexandra and Nicholas, by their flattering attentions, only encouraged him to new heights, and there is no doubt that his contention that he came to the palace only on their insistence is important and probably true. Alexandra was indeed fascinated with the idea that God had favored her by glimpses of the divine purpose for Russia by the gift of these strange messengers. Even in the last weeks of her reign, in fact only a few days before the death of Rasputin, we read in a letter to her husband of her trip to the Dessi#tinni Monastery to visit the "old woman Maria Mikhailovna." She is reported as being 107 years old, with "scraggy hair" and no regard for personal cleanliness. The Empress was ecstatic at this:

She blessed us & kissed us. To you she sends the apple (please eat it)----said the war wld. soon be over---"Tell him that we are satisfied." To me she said "and you the beautiful one----don't fear the heavy cross (several times)----said "don't forget us, come again." I thank God for having let us see her.⁴

Nicholas was compliant, as usual. "We have eaten the staritss's apple, and have both found it excellent," he wrote to his wife.⁵

When war came and the inevitable intrigues of the capital grew even greater, Nicholas was convinced that his throne was in danger. Rasputin had a good deal to do with this conviction, and

⁴Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, December 12, 1916, pp. 451-52.

⁵Vulliamy, Letters of Tsar, December 16, 1916, p. 309.

Alexandra, of course, seconded his views. Away from the capital, Nicholas felt that he could not be both Commander-in-Chief in the field and the chief executive in the capital. Indeed, he did need assistance to carry this complex and demanding burden. With his wife the only one he believed he could trust, Nicholas gave his consent for her to initiate and decide many important matters governing the internal conditions of Russia. As she had admitted, her faith in Rasputin as God's messenger to them placed him in the position of primary advisor, and soon it was Alexandra who was the messenger and Rasputin the sovereign.

Even Rasputin's death could not erase the special place he had held in the imperial couple's lives. He was buried in grounds adjoining the Palace Park in the presence of the whole Imperial family.⁶ A year later, on their way to their exile and death in Siberia, the imperial family halted in the village of Pokrovskoe for a change of horses. In his diary for that day, Nicholas recorded that from the station they could see Rasputin's house with all of his family peering from the windows. The imperial family was not allowed to speak with any of Rasputin's family, but the Tsar writes that "we stood for a long time opposite Gregory's house looking at all of his family watching us from the windows."⁷ The affection that the imperial family had for Rasputin, had not died with him.

⁶Pares, Letters of Tsaritsa, From the introduction by Sir Bernard Pares, p. xi.

⁷"Dnevnik Nikolai Romanova 1918 god" [The Diary of Nicholas Romanov for 1918], Krasnyi Arkhiv, XXVVI [1928], p. 125.

In consideration of all circumstances, therefore, the relationship between Rasputin and his sovereigns had no need for hypnotic suggestion or drugs. In a sense, Rasputin and Alexandra had "hypnotized" one another, and as the winds of destiny blew through the halls of Tsarskoe Selo, both the monarchy and Rasputin were swept away with them.

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