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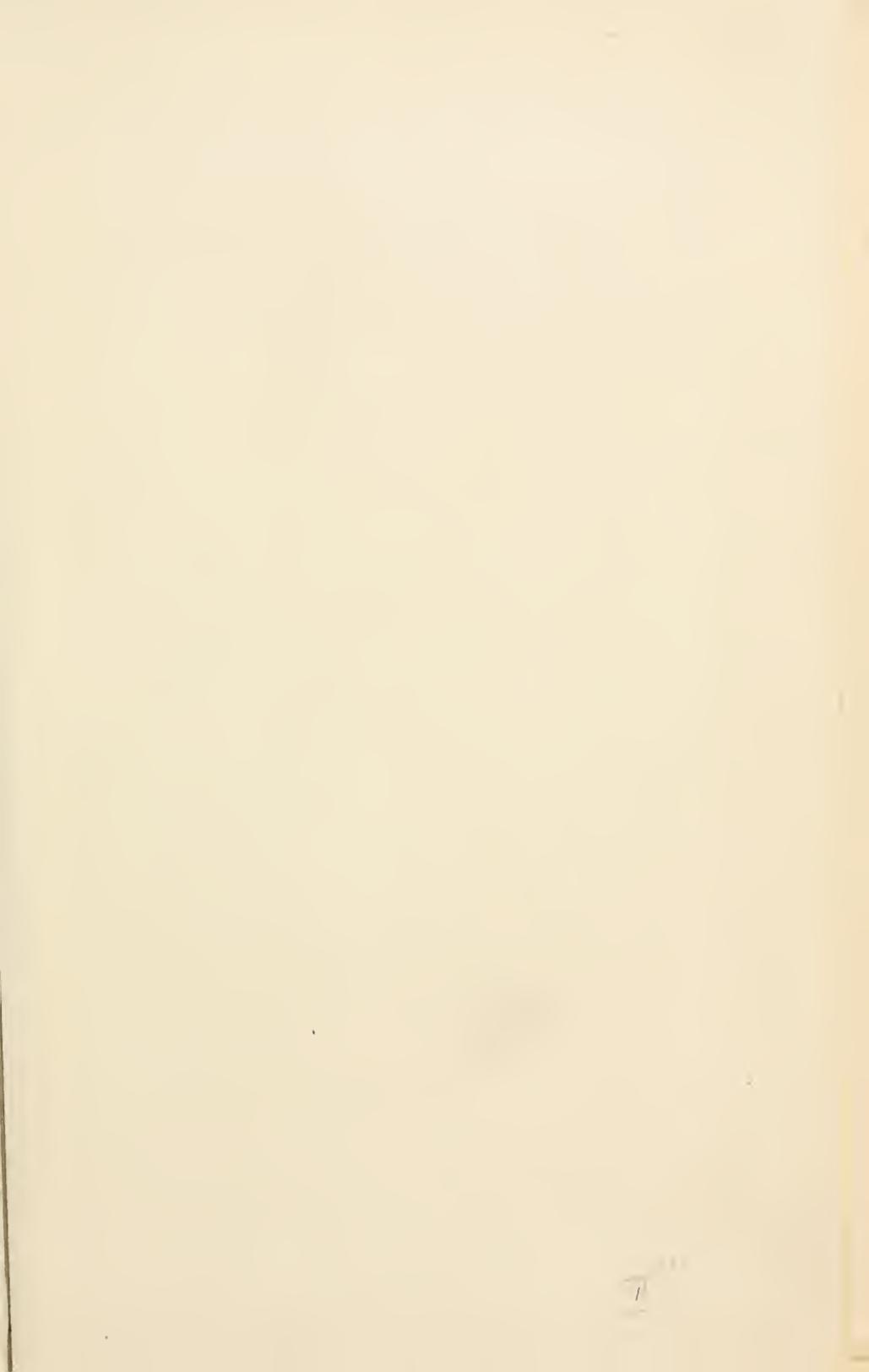
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Peter

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PETER THE GREAT

BY

K. WALISZEWSKI

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF AN EMPRESS'

'THE STORY OF A THRONE,' ETC.

Translated from the French

By *LADY MARY LOYD*

With a Portrait

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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P R E F A C E

‘Measure thy powers on thine undertaking—and not the undertaking
by thy powers.’

THIS bold advice, the dictum of a poet and fellow-countryman of my own, has been the almost indispensable inspiration of this historical work of mine. The figure which forms its subject—towering above the history, bound up, to this very hour, with the existence, of the Russian nation—is not one to be lightly approached.

Therefore it is that I have come to him so late, that I have worked backwards, up the course of the years, from the great Inheritress to the creator of her inheritance.

Have I dared, then, at last, to exchange glances with that great bronze giant, who, so the poets say, ‘steps down, on twilight nights, from his granite pedestal, hard by the Neva river-bank, and rides through the sleeping city’—triumphant even in death? Have I indeed—oh, mighty ghost! who, for well-nigh two hundred years, like some terrible and familiar demon, hauntest the places thou didst know in life,—have I, in good truth, happened on the magic formula which brings back speech to phantoms, and builds life up around them, out of the dust of bygone days?

I have lived those dead hours over again, in fancy. I have seen the faces, I have felt the warmth, of the beings and the things that filled them. I have laid my finger on the miracle of that legendary reign—the realisation of the fabled grain of wheat which sprouts and straightway grows into a

plant on the palm of the Hindu *Yoghi's* hand. And I have had speech with the Man of Miracles himself,—the one *unique* man, perhaps, in the history of the human race. Napoleon is the greatest of Frenchmen, or the greatest of Italians, according to the fancy of his historian. He is not France nor Italy incarnate. Peter is Russia—her flesh and blood, her temperament and genius, her virtues and her vices. With his various aptitudes, his multiplicity of effort, his tumultuous passions, he rises up before us, a collective being. This makes his greatness. This raises him far above the pale shadows which our feeble historical evocation strives to snatch out of oblivion. There is no need to call his figure up. He stands before us, surviving his own existence, perpetuating himself—a continual actual fact.

The face of the world he seems to have called out of chaos may have modified, but the principle of its existence is unchanged. The immeasurable force is there, which, these three centuries past, has defied all calculation, which has transformed Ivan's wretched patrimony,—a sparsely inhabited patch of wild steppe land,—into the inheritance of Alexander and of Nicholas—into an empire exceeding in size and population every other known sovereignty in Europe, Asia, and Africa—surpassing those of Alexander the Great, or Ancient Rome, the realm of the Khaliphs, and even the present British Empire, with all its colonies—an area of some eight and a half millions of square miles, a population of one hundred and twenty million souls! Once upon a time that force was called 'Peter the Great.' The name is changed now. The characteristics are unchanged. It is still the soul of a great people—and the soul, too, of a great man, in whom the thoughts and wills of millions of human beings appear incarnate. That force is centred in him, and he in it. I have tried, in these pages of mine, to make it throb.

Not, be sure, by mere dint of my imagination. Everything that could be drawn from documentary evidence—the only pass-key which can re-open the doors each passing hour

closes upon us—I have used. I hope I have been exact. I know I have been sincere; I may have roused surprise, disappointment, even anger. I would urge my Russian readers to weigh their impressions carefully. Courage to acknowledge what one is, and even what one has been, is a very necessary quality. For Russia, this courage is a very easy one.

I would pray my Russian readers too, and all others, not to misunderstand the nature of the object I have set before me. When Poushkin was collecting materials for his biography of the national hero, he spoke of raising a monument—*aere perennius*, which was to be too firmly set to be removed by human hand, and dragged from square to square. Some national grudge, it would appear, existed—some doubt was felt, as to the unchangeable stability of Falconnet's masterpiece. The poet's ambition, his care for his subject's reputation, common to most of my forerunners, not in Russia only, have never affected me. Peter—without any help of mine—already has the monument which, as I fain would think, befits him best. Not Poushkin's, nor yet the work of the French sculptor's chisel. The monument of which I speak was begun by his own rugged hands. His successors will labour on it, yet, for many a year. The last stone set, and that a mighty one, is the Trans-Siberian railway.

My object, as I say, has been very different. The eyes of the whole modern world have long been fixed—some in sympathy, others, again, dark with suspicion and hostility—on the mighty sea of physical and moral energy which surged up suddenly between Old Europe, wearied out with eager life, and Ancient Asia, wearied, too, with the stillness and stagnation of hers. Will the common destinies of the two Continents sink in that huge abyss? Or will its waters prove another Fountain of Jouvence? The whole world hangs over the chasm, on either side, waiting in anxious apprehension, peering into the depths, striving to fathom them. My part is simply to offer certain information to this universal curiosity and dread.

Behold! This may be the appointed hour! The dawn of an unknown day whitens the sky. A mist, where phantom figures seem to float, rises over the broad river. Hark! Was it a horse's hoof that rang on the silent stones? . . .

K. W.

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PART I
HIS EDUCATION

BOOK I—FROM ASIA TO EUROPE

CHAPTER I

THE KREML,¹ AND THE GERMAN FAUBOURG

- I. The marriage of Tsar Alexis—The choice of the bride—The crown to the fairest—The dormitory in the Kremlin—Nathalia Naryshkin—The birth of Peter—His paternity contested—The struggle between the Naryshkin and the Miloslavski—Exile.
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mony under a Mongol protectorate—Emancipation—Ivan the Great—Dawn of a new culture—European influences—Poles, Germans, English, and Dutchmen.
- III. The German Faubourg—Europe and Asia—A Muscovite Ghetto—The work of civilisation—Expansion—Thither Peter will go.
- IV. Times of trial—The last attempt at an Asiatic *régime*—Deaths of Alexis and Féodor—An elected Tsar—The *rôle* of the Patriarchs—The victory of the Naryshkin—Peter proclaimed—A short-lived triumph—The revenge of the Miloslavski.

I

PETER ALEKSIÉIEVITCH was born on the 30th of May 1672—the year 7180, according to the calendar then used in his country.

Two years and a half before his birth, the ancient Kremlin of Moscow had beheld a strange sight. Dozens of young girls, chosen amongst the loveliest discoverable, drawn from the most distant provinces, from every rank and station,—gentle and simple, from castle and from hut, and even from religious houses, had entered the Tsar's palace, on a day

¹ The name is thus spelt and pronounced in Russian. Kremlin is a spurious form, of Polish origin.

appointed by himself. There, crowded haphazard into the six rooms appointed to their use, they had led the usual life of Muscovite wives and maidens of that age—the cloistered existence, idle and monotonous, of Eastern women, scarce broken by some slight manual task, scarce brightened, here and there, by an occasional song. Thus, all day long they dreamt, and pined, and sighed, and yawned over oft-repeated tales and legends, bristling with wonderful absurdities. But when night fell, ah! then all the hours of weariness, and disgust, and impatient longing, were forgotten; and each young creature, her every sense on the alert, felt her soul leap and tremble with the sudden palpitation of a tremendous chance, in the feverish but short-lived sensation, nightly recurring, of an exquisite terror, and anxiety, and hope. Masculine forms loomed on the threshold of the suite of rooms, which were converted into dormitories when darkness fell. Two men passed between the narrow beds, leisurely examining the lovely sleepers, exchanging significant words and gestures. And one of these was the Tsar Alexis Mihailovitch—the Tsar himself—in *propria persona*, accompanied by his doctor, and seeking, amongst those unknown beauties, his chosen wife,—‘the woman,’ as the time-honoured formula has it, ‘worthy to be the Sovereign’s delight,’ the woman whom, though she were the daughter of the meanest of his serfs, he might, on the morrow, make a Grand Duchess first, and then Tsarina of all the Russias.

The custom, two centuries old already, had been borrowed from the Byzantines, partly for high political reasons, a little too, out of sheer necessity. Ivan Vassilévitch (‘the Great,’ 1435-1505), had vainly sought a wife for his son among the princesses of foreign houses. The King of Denmark, the Margrave of Brandenbiurg, had alike rebuffed him scornfully. And he would have no more alliances with his neighbours and rivals, the Russian Dukes. So he caused fifteen hundred maidens to be gathered together at Moscow—the Grand Ducal coronet should be bestowed on the fairest, at all events, if not on the most nobly born. A century later, the Tsar Michael Féodorovitch, who attempted matrimony with a foreign princess, met with no better success. The Danish King even went so far as to refuse to receive the Russian Envoys.¹ From that time out, the custom had been

¹ Zabielin, *Domestic History of the Tsarinas* (Moscow, 1872), p. 245.

definitely established. Certain ladies and gentlemen of the Court were deputed to examine the young girls who came to Moscow, in answer to the Imperial call. Their inspection, minute and severe, extended to the most intimate details. Thus, by a process of selection, only the daintiest morsels were actually presented to the Tsar.¹

But occasionally, as in 1670, this custom became a mere formality. The dreams of the fair sleepers were doomed, this time, to disappointment; their nocturnal wiles were to be displayed in vain. The Sovereign's choice had been fixed before their arrival in the city. The Tsar Alexis Mihaïlovitch was thirty-eight years of age when his first wife—a Miloslavski, who had borne him five sons and eight daughters—died, in the year 1667. Of these sons, three were already dead; the survivors, Féodor and Ivan, were both sickly; and the Tsar's evident duty was to consider the question of remarriage. He considered it seriously, when his eye fell, one day, in the house of Artamon Sierguéievitch Matviéief, on a beautiful brunette, whom he took, at first, for the daughter of his favourite counsellor. Nathalia Kirillovna Naryshkin was only his ward, confided by her father, an obscure and needy country gentleman, to the care of the rich and powerful boyard. The fair Nathalia could never have burst on her Sovereign's dazzled eyes in any true Muscovite house, where local custom was held in due respect. The young girl must have remained invisible, behind the impenetrable portals of the *terem*. But the Matviéief household was emancipated from the ordinary rule. Artamon had married a foreigner—a Hamilton. The tempest of revolution which had overwhelmed the great Jacobite families, had cast up some branches of them, even upon the inhospitable shores of that distant and barbarous empire. Alexis welcomed the strangers, and Matviéief actually owed a portion of his master's favour to his alliance with one of them. His marriage had also given him a certain culture. He read much; he had a library, a museum, a small chemical laboratory. Nathalia had her place at her adopted parents' table—sometimes even amongst their guests. Alexis began by saying he would undertake to find the girl a husband 'who would ask for no fortune with her.' Then, suddenly, he made up his mind and spoke out. Artamon Sierguéi-

¹ Zabielin, *Domestic History of the Tsarinas* (Moscow, 1872), p. 222.

iévitich was more alarmed than pleased. His position as imperial favourite had already procured him numerous enemies. Sprung from a somewhat obscure family, he had pushed himself into the foremost rank, he was at the head of various departments; he managed Foreign Affairs, the Mint, he was Court Minister, Commander of the *Streltsy*, Governor of Little Russia, of Kasan and of Astrakan. He begged, at all events, to be shielded by appearances. Nathalia had to show herself in the dormitory at the Kreml. All the rites were scrupulously observed. The uncle of one fair aspirant actually had to face the justice of the Tsar for having used fraudulent manœuvres in his niece's favour, and was put to the question, ordinary and extraordinary, by the knout, by the strappado, and by fire. The marriage was solemnised on 22nd January 1671, and on 30th May (12th June) 1672, Nathalia Kirillovna bore a son.

On that very day, Louis XIV. supplied Boileau with the subject of a famous epistle, as he watched his army, led by Condé and Turenne, pass over the Rhine. On that very day, too, at the opposite end of Europe, the Turkish army passed the Dniester, to clasp hands across space with that of the *Grand Monarque*, and take the Empire in the rear. Neither of these events awoke much interest at Moscow, where all were rejoicing over the birth of the Tsarevitich. Life there was too circumscribed and obscure to be much affected by the great currents of European politics. Obscure and doubtful, too, to this very hour, is the birthplace of the greatest man Russia ever produced. Was it the Moscow Kreml? the neighbouring country house of Kolomenskoïé, dubbed the Russian *Bethlehem*? Or was it Ismaïlovo? No absolute certainty exists. The dispute is carried further still. Peter bore no resemblance, physical or moral, to his elder brothers and sisters,—puny and feeble all of them, like Féodor and Ivan, all, even the fair Sophia herself, bearing a taint in their blood. And could Alexis, worn out by illness, foredoomed to an early death, have bestowed, on any son of his, that giant stature, those iron muscles, that full life? Who then? Was it the German surgeon, who replaced the daughter Nathalia really brought into the world, by his own son? Was it the courtier, Tihone Nikititch Streshnief, a man of humble birth, lately brought into prominence by the marriage of the Tsar Michael Romanof with the fair

Eudoxia? Once upon a time, Peter, heated with wine, sought (so at least the story goes) to peer into this shadow. 'That fellow,' he cried, pointing to one of the company, Ivan Mussin-Pushkin, 'knows, at all events, that he is *my* father's son! Whose son am I? Yours, Tihon Streshnief? Obey me, speak, and fear nothing! Speak! or I'll have you strangled!'

'*Batiushka*, mercy!' comes the answer. 'I know not what to say. . . . I was not the only one!'¹

But every kind of story has been told!

The death of Alexis (1674) marks the beginning of a troubled period, out of which Peter's despotic power rises, storm-laden and blood-stained, like the times which gave it birth.

This period makes its definite mark on the destiny of the future Reformer. From its very outset, he becomes the hero of a drama, the naturally indicated chief of an opposition party. Beside the yet warm corpse of their common Master, the two families, called out of their obscurity by the Tsar's two marriages, engage in desperate struggle.

The Naryshkins of a later generation have claimed a relatively illustrious origin, in connection with a Czech family, the Narisci, which once reigned at Egra. But the Tartar Narish, noted by the historian Müller as one of the familiars of the *Kniaz* Ivan Vassilévitch (1463), would appear a more authentic ancestor.

The Miloslavski were the Muscovite branch of the Korsak, an ancient Lithuanian family, settled in Poland. Deprived by the new comers of their rank and influence, they felt themselves alike injured and humiliated. Nathalia's father, Kiril Poluëktovitch, had risen, in a few years, to be one of the richest men in the country, Court Councillor (*dumnyi dvorianin*) and Grand Officer of the Crown (*okolnitshyï*). The bells that tolled for the funeral of Alexis rang out the hour of vengeance on his rival's ears. 'Miloslavski against Naryshkin!' For the next thirteen years that war-cry was to rule the fate of Russia, casting it into the blood-stained struggle between the two parties fighting for power.

¹ Vockerodt, *Correspondence* (published by Herrmann, Leipsic, 1872), p. 108. Solovief, *Hist. of Russia* (Moscow, 1864-1878), vol. xv. pp. 126-135. Siemievski, *Study of the State Police in Russia* (Slovo i Dielo) (St. Petersburg, 1885), p. 139. Dolgoroukof, *Mémoires* (Geneva, 1867), vol. i. p. 102.

Matviéief, Nathalia's adoptive father, beaten in his first skirmish, heads the list of victims. He was imprisoned, tortured, exiled to Pustoziersk in Siberia, where he almost died of hunger.¹ For a moment, there was some question of immuring Nathalia in a cloister; but the mother and son were finally sent to Préobrajenskoïé, a village near Moscow, where Alexis had built him a house. Thus Peter left the Kreml, never to return, save for a very short space of time, during which he was to endure the most cruel trials, the most odious outrages, to watch the murder of his own kinsfolk, to see the Sovereign's authority cast down into the lowest depths, to witness his own downfall. Then it was that he vowed relentless hatred to the gloomy palace. Even as Conqueror and all-powerful Master, he pointedly turned his back upon it. That rupture was the symbol of his life and of its work.

II

The Kreml of the present day—a crowded and haphazard collection of incongruous buildings, utterly devoid, for the most part, of style or character—conveys but a faint conception of the palace of Alexis Mihaïlovitch, as it appeared at the end of the seventeenth century. The fires of 1701 and 1737, and the reconstruction which took place in 1752,² have left the barest traces of the curious Italian Renaissance, introduced, at the close of the fifteenth century, by the daughter of a Paleologus, educated at Rome.³ Some vestiges still exist of the struggle of the genius of Fioravante, of Solaro, of Alevisse, with Byzantine tradition; a few churches, a few fragments of palaces, and the outer walls—more like those of a fortified camp than of a royal residence, with their far-stretching low ramparts, and their brick towers showing in slim outline, here and there, like warriors on the watch. Without these walls, on the Red Square, the only edifice which powerfully conjures up the vanished past is the Church of Vassili the Blessed. Within them, doubtless, there was the same architectural confusion,—the same violent

¹ See *History of his Captivity*, published at Moscow, 1785, by Novikoff.

² Zabielin, *Domestic History of the Tsars* (Moscow, 1895), pp. 110-118. Oustrialof, *History of Peter I.* (St. Petersburg, 1858), vol. iv. p. 33.

³ P. Pierling, *La Russie et le St. Siège* (Paris, 1896), p. 107.

juxtaposition of the German gothic style with those of India, of Byzantium, and of Italy,—the same tangle of edifices, packed one within the other like a Chinese puzzle,—the same strange, wild orgy of decoration, of form, of colour—a delirium and fever, a veritable surfeit of plastic fancy. Small rooms, surbased vaulted roofs, gloomy corridors, lamps twinkling out of the darkness, on the walls the lurid glow of mingled ochres and vermilions, iron bars to every window, armed men at every door; a swarming population of monks and warriors everywhere. The palace rubbed shoulders with the church and the monastery, and was scarcely distinguishable from them. The Sovereign, on his throne, was like the neighbouring relic of some Saint, within its shrine. From one end to the other of that strange accumulation of buildings, sacred and secular dwellings, cathedrals and convents by the score, confused noises,—dulled and stifled by massive walls, thick oriental hangings, and the heavy air imprisoned within them,—rose and fell, their echoes intermingling in a vague harmony of sound. From within the churches sounded the voices of chanting priests; from the *terem* came the singing of the women—now and again a sharper note would echo from some corner of the palace, scene of a secret orgy, and then a shriller cry, the plaint of some tortured prisoner in his dungeon. But, for the most part, silence reigned; men whispered under their breath; they stepped carefully, feeling their way. Each one watched his neighbour, and his neighbour him. It was a crypt, a seraglio, a gaol, in one.

This being so, the Kreml was more than the mere residence of the Tsar. All Russia was here concentrated and summed up,—a strange Russia, ten centuries old, and yet an infant; a long historic past behind her, yet standing, apparently, on the threshold of her history. This Russia, severed from her European neighbours, who know her not, yet has European blood of the purest in her veins, her annals teem with European traditions, alliances, relationships, ay, and with traces of a common fate, in good fortune and ill, in victory and disaster.

Between the ninth and tenth centuries, when the earliest French Kings, Charles le Gros and Louis le Bègue, are struggling painfully to defend their treasures from Norman robbers, other Sea Kings land on the Baltic shore. Yonder

the Norman, Hrolf, wrests the coast country, called after his race, from Charles the Simple. Here, on the mighty plain that stretches from the Baltic to the Black Sea, among the scanty Finnish or Slavonic population which alone disturbs the solitude, the Norman Rurik and his followers found their Empire.¹

A century and a half later, at the three farthest corners of Europe, three heroic leaders affirm the supremacy of the same race, covering it with the common glory of their conquests. In Italy, Robert Guiscard founds the House of Hauteville. William the Conqueror seats himself in England. Jaroslav reigns in Russia.

But this Russia is not the Russia of Moscow. Moscow does not exist, as yet. Jaroslav's capital is at Kief, a very different place, far nearer to the Western world. Rurik's descendants, dwelling there, keep up close relations with Greece, with Italy, with Poland, with Germany. Byzantium sends them monks, and learned men, and stately prelates. Italy and Germany give them architects, artificers, merchants, and the elements of Roman law. Towards the year 1000, Vladimar, the 'Red Sun' of the Rhapsodes, commands his lords to send their children to the schools he has established near the churches; he makes roads, and deposits test weights and measures in the churches. His son Jaroslav (1015-1054) coins money, builds palaces, adorns the open spaces of his capital with Greek and Latin sculpture, and draws up a code of laws. The five pictures preserved in the Vatican, under the name of the Capponi Collection, are an authentic proof, and a most curious specimen, of Russian art as it flourished at Kief in the twelfth century.² The execution is masterly, in no way inferior to the best work of the early Italians, such as Andrea Rico di Candia. And these are not the only signs of culture at Kief. In 1170, at Smolensk, we find the *Kniaz*, Roman Rostislavitch, busied with learned

¹ This conquest, although disputed by Slavophil historians, would seem to be an undoubted fact. See Solovief's refutation of Ilovaiski's opinion (*Collected Works on Politics* (Bezobrazof, 1879), vol. vii.), and the Studies of Father Martynof (*Revue des Questions Historiques*, July 1875. *Polybiblion*, 1875). Solovief at all events makes the admission—a consoling one to the national vanity—that the Slav tribes submitted voluntarily to a foreign *Kniaz*, whom they called to rule over them.

² This collection was presented by Peter the Great to Count Capponi, in acknowledgment of his share in obtaining the signature of a commercial treaty with Genoa.

subjects. He collects libraries, founds schools and seminaries, where the classical languages are taught. From one end to the other of the huge Empire just beginning to take shape, between the Don and the Carpathians, the Volga and the Dvina, a busy trade is already carried on with Europe—western, southern, and northern. Novgorod commands the commerce of the Baltic. At Kief a motley crowd of merchants—Norman, Slav, Hungarian, Venetian, Genoese, German, Arab, and Jew—fill the streets, and deal in every kind of product. In 1028 there were a dozen markets in the city. And these Dukes of Kief have no need to seek their wives within their subjects' *terems*. Jaroslav espouses a Swede, Ingegard, the daughter of King Olaf. He marries his sister to King Casimir of Poland; one of his sons, Vsievod, to the daughter of the Emperor Constantine Monomachus of Byzantium; another, Viatcheslaf, to a Countess of Stade; a third, Igor, to Kunigunde, Countess of Orlamünde. His eldest daughter, Elizabeth, weds King Harold of Norway; the third, Anastasia, King Andreas I. of Hungary. Three Bishops, Gautier de Meaux, Gosselin de Chalignac, and Roger de Châlons, come to Kief, in 1048, to ask the hand of the second daughter, Anne, for Henry I. of France.

Before the middle of the thirteenth century all this crumbles and disappears, leaving no trace behind. The Empire had not as yet really found its feet: it was not founded upon the rock, firm to withstand any violent shock. Dukes of Kief, of Novgorod, of Smolensk, though they were, these Rurikovitch, in spite of their union of warlike instinct with very remarkable organising powers, bore about with them the brand of their origin—a ferment of disorder and violence, from which nothing but the action of time, bringing with it long established submission to the customs of civilised societies, and the laws of a strongly organised State, could have delivered them. Time played them false. The blow came in 1224, when Baty, with his Mongol hordes, appeared upon the scene. At that moment, after some attempt, early in the twelfth century, at concentration, under Vladimir Monomachus, sixty petty princes were quarrelling over scraps of power and rags of sovereignty between the Volga and the Bug. Baty and Mangu, a grandson of Gengis Khan, forced them into reconciliation.

Centuries of endeavour and of civilising effort were thus to disappear into the dust raised by the hoofs of a hundred thousand horses. Of ancient Russia, Europeanised, indeed, by its conquerors, but in no sense denationalised,—thanks to the rapid absorption of the scanty Norman element—not a trace remained. In the following century, between 1319 and 1340, Kief and the neighbouring countries fell into the hands of the future Kings of Poland, still Dukes of Lithuania.

After the reign of Giedymine, Jagellon, annexing all the fragments of the ephemeral sovereignty of Monomachus—Red Russia, White Russia, Black Russia, Little Russia—to the new Polish-Lithuanian Empire, wielded the sceptre of ‘all the Russias,’—as the time-honoured formula now runs. And the countries he annexed were little more than deserts. At this moment the history of the Rurikovitch sovereignty seems utterly closed.

But it springs up afresh, eastward of the huge space marked out by Fate as the dwelling-place of an innumerable population, and the scene of an immeasurable development. In the upper basin of the Volga, on the banks of the Moskva, in the midst of a sparse Finnish population, a poor village, overlooked by a strong fortified castle, had, since the twelfth century, been the home and appanage of one of the descendants of Rurik. Destroyed, more than once, in the course of incessant warfare with its Rurikovitch neighbours, swept by the wave of invading Mongols, this village raised its head again and again, increased in size, and, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, already formed the nucleus of a fresh agglomeration of Norman, Slav, and Finnish elements. Taking docile submission to the yoke of the Asiatic conquerors for his rule, the *Kniaz* of Moscow ended by making that yoke serve as an organising instrument, useful alike for internal government, and external expansion. Humbly, patiently, adroitly, he undertook the duties of an intermediary—welcomed by one side for his usefulness, endured by the other as a necessity—between the conquerors and the conquered; stooping to play the part of tax-collector for the common master, of police agent, of executioner, if need be. Extending and strengthening, by slow degrees, the superiority thus dearly bought, the wily *Kniaz*s succeeded each other, until the day should come—long waited, carefully prepared—when one should be strong enough to break the

infamous compact, which had served him and his forebears as a tool for their own emancipation.

Thus well-nigh two centuries passed. Two centuries, in the course of which the neighbouring *Knias*—of Péréiaslavl, Riazan, Vladimir, Ouglitch, Halitch, Rostov, Jaroslavl, Souzdal—became one by one, little by little, first of all vassals, and finally mere chief subjects, *boyards*, of the *Knias* of Moscow, whose power swelled visibly, while the Mongol Hegemony, worn out and broken up by internal discord, steadily declined. At last, somewhere about 1480, the period of probation drew to a close, and astounded Europe suddenly became aware that, between herself and Asia, there lay a new Empire, whose chief had formally declared its independence, having driven the Golden Horde beyond the newly traced frontiers of the immense territory under his rule, wedded at Rome, with a Greek Princess from Constantinople, and taken the double-headed eagle for his emblem. His name was Ivan, known by his subjects as ‘Ivan the Great.’

But this new sovereignty was not that of Kief, and, but for the dynastic origin of its Head, it would seem to have nought in common with that which constituted the power and glory of Jaroslav and Vladimir. The Grand Duke of Moscow might indeed dub himself Sovereign of ‘all the Russias,’ but the provinces he thus claimed, and called his own, were not in his keeping. They belonged to Poland. The country he actually held was quite independent, so far as three-fourths of it were concerned, of that conquered by the ancient Normans, and, everything, or almost everything, both in his Empire and his Capital, was of newer origin, and essentially different in character. Europe, so to speak, had no place there.

The flood, receding from this soil, had left behind it, like a heavy clay deposit, all its more stable elements—form of government, customs, habits of thought. No germ of culture remained, and for the best of reasons. Save for the traditions of the Byzantine-Russian Church, preserved by Greek monks and nuns, the state and the society which had struggled into organised existence, under the tutelage of the successors of Baty, were essentially Asiatic, and genuinely barbarous. State and society alike, during their long separation from Europe, had known nothing of the great school in which the

intellectual and moral unity of the West was shaped ; of the feudal system, the Crusades, chivalry, the study of Roman Law, out of which the modern spirit has risen, stepping backwards from its first springs ; of the great struggle between the religious and the temporal powers, in which the spirit of freedom took its birth. When the Metropolitan of Moscow (only recently—1325 or 1381—called into existence) refused the amalgamation with Rome, decided at the Council of Florence, and accepted by the Metropolitan of Kief, the city, voluntarily and deliberately, broke with the Western World. The obscure and remote Eastern schism, condemned by the Pope, withdrew itself beyond the pale of Christianity. When men had grown weary of disputing over it, they were to cast it into oblivion.

But culture began to sprout afresh, pushing up slowly, through the thick crust of Asiatic mire. It came as best it could—from Europe always—and first of all from Poland, through the great Lithuanian lords, who had been Russians before they were Poles. Before the insurgent Kurbski, Ivan the Great's whilom helper, took refuge with his neighbours, he kept up close correspondence with the Czartoryski, Russian and orthodox still, to the backbone. Ivan himself, returning victorious from Poland, brought back, as booty and symbolic trophy, the first printing press ever seen in Moscow. The conquest of Novgorod (1475) had served to bring the new Empire into contact with the Hanse towns. In 1553 the English discovered the mouth of the Dvina. Next came the foundation of the town of Archangel, and the beginning of commerce in the Northern seas. Then fresh invasion—and the struggle for existence began once more. This time, happily, the invading wave came from a different quarter. It rolled back from Europe, passing away more rapidly than the last, and leaving something more than mere mud behind it. The Polish armies brought the whole paraphernalia of Rome in their train. Jesuits and Sons of St. Bernard—Catholic propaganda, and the learning of the schools. After the Jesuits—learned, fluent, shrewd—come the mock Tsars, likewise of Polish origin, subtle and elegant. The Court of Dimitri and Marina Mniszcz is modelled on that of Sigismund, who had formed his after the counsel of his wife, Bone Sforza, whose Polish orchestra mingles its secular strains with the rites of the Orthodox Church! At the

very moment of the definite triumph of the national cause, Western and Polish influences are affirmed, even in the very victories and re-establishment of the Muscovite element in Poland, and in the West. When the armies of Tsar Alexis entered Kief, they found no sign, doubtless, of what the Mongol conquerors had found there—no trace of former splendours. Yet they found something better than the emptiness and void at Moscow. Some schools of Polish origin, a printing press too, ready to replace that of Ivan (promptly anathematised and long since destroyed), and a Greco-Latin Ecclesiastical Academy. A modest capital of civilisation, easy of assimilation, stood ready to their hand.

III

From this time forward Moscow had power to turn her back on Asia, and re-enter Europe, without crossing the frontier. That Peter, driven out of the Kreml, and into the street, as it were, by the rival faction, felt no desire to return to his ancestral dwelling, must be written down to the fact that he had found another and a more attractive home in its close vicinity. When Ivan annexed Novgorod,—that stronghold of republicanism and insubordination,—he resolved to break its turbulent spirit by changing its population. Ten thousand families had thus to be removed. Russia owns the secret of these successful administrative *coups d'état*, whereby whole masses of humanity are set in physical motion. The exiled Novgorodians departed to Moscow, where room was made for them, by sending an equal number of faithful and docile Moscovians—their very docility their punishment—to Novgorod. These new arrivals included certain Hanseatic merchants, who formed the first nucleus of the foreign colony on the banks of the Moskva. But it soon became evident, to Russian eyes, that these foreigners profaned the place. Local patriotism found its interest, even at that date, in claiming that Moscow was a holy city, and then, as now, the whole of Muscovy joined in this beatification. Beyond the gates of the old capital, towards the north-western corner of the modern city, in the quarter lying between Basmannaïa Street and Pokrovskaïa Street, where, at the present day, most of the Protestant and Catholic churches stand, there

arose,—on the banks of the Iaouza, a scanty affluent of the Moskva,—a kind of Ghetto, specially assigned to the *Niemtsy*, those who did not speak the tongue of the country, and who, in consequence, were *niemoi*, dumb. The Hanse merchants prospered little here, but, in the sixteenth century, Tsar Vassili lodged his bodyguard of Poles, Lithuanians, and Germans in the quarter. Vassili's successors brought in not foreign soldiers only—they sent abroad for artisans and artists, and, before long, for schoolmasters. An engraving in Adelung's curious book depicts the primitive appearance of the suburb, where the immigrants were crowded together, shut up and hemmed in, by severe and successive edicts. It was still a mere village of wooden houses, roughly built with unbarked tree-trunks,—huge kitchen gardens surrounding each dwelling. But a rapid change was working both in the appearance of the place, and in the nature of its inhabitants. Under Tsar Alexis, the only German quality about the *Niemietskaïa Sloboda* was the name, or *sobriquet*, of *Niemiets*, which had clung to the suburb—a relic of the German origin of its original inhabitants. English and Scotchmen now held the foremost place, and among them—thanks to the proscriptions of Lord Protector Cromwell, there were many noble names—Drummonds, Hamiltons, Dalziels, Crawfurds, Grahams, Leslies, and, at a later period, Gordons. No Frenchmen as yet. They were coldly looked on, as Catholics, and, yet more, as Jansenists. The Jacobites were the only exceptions to this rule,—their proscribed condition being taken to vouch for their fidelity.

Later on, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was to earn the same confidence for the subjects of the Most Christian King. The Jacobites lived somewhat apart. They were no traders, nor in any way industrious. Yet they were a powerful factor in the budding prosperity of the *Sloboda*. Their education and demeanour inspired the Muscovites with a sense of respect. The German troopers of the first period had taught the natives nothing, save the manners of Wallenstein's camp. In the professional class, soon to be added to this aristocratic one—merchants, teachers, physicians, apothecaries, traders, artists—the dominant element was Dutch; but the quality of the German contingent, mingled with it, improved. Both nationalities brought with them, and exemplified, the special virtues of their race;—a

spirit of enterprise, perseverance, piety, family affection, a common aspiration towards an ideal of order, of domestic peace, and fruitful toil. The Dutch had a Calvinist, the Germans, two Lutheran pastors; but, face to face with the barbarians, religious dissension appears to have died away. Liberty reigned in the *Sloboda*, save in the case of the Catholics, who were forbidden to have a priest. Schools became numerous. Patrick Gordon, a Scotchman, followed the proceedings of the London Royal Society. English ladies sent for bales of novels and poetry by British writers. Pleasure was moderate and decent in its course. At German gatherings, the dance known as '*Grossvateranz*' was considered the wildest form of entertainment. There was a theatre, frequented by Tsar Alexis, where he saw a performance of *Orphée*.

Politics played a considerable part in the life of the colony. The members of the Diplomatic Corps, who all resided in it, the English, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish residents, represented the interests, or stirred the passions, of the various Protestant powers. The Dutch resident, Van Keller—rich, cultivated, cautious, and adroit—held quite a special position, before which the Muscovites themselves respectfully bowed. He sent a weekly messenger to the Hague, and the Western news he thus received made the *Sloboda* quiver to the echo of those great events which were then working out the political fate of the European world.¹ The German traveller, Tanner,² who visited the colony in 1678, carried away a most pleasing impression, confirmed and justified by an engraving dated early in the eighteenth century.

This shows us the suburb utterly transformed. Comfortable-looking brick houses, approached through flowery gardens, straight alleys planted with trees, fountains in the squares. The contrast with Russian towns of the period, Moscow not excepted, is very striking. It was not to escape the eye of Peter the Great.

In spite of Polish influence, in spite of its near neighbourhood to a country which brought Europe, so to speak, to its

¹ Vulliemmin, after Posselt, *Revue Suisse*, vol. xxix. p. 323. Brückner, *Cultur-historische Studien* (Riga, 1878).

² Tanner, *Legatio Polono—Lithuanica in Moscoviam* (Nuremberg, 1689), p. 71, etc.

very gates, Moscow was still, take it all in all, what three centuries of Asiatic slavery had made it. Some signs there were, indeed, which clearly marked a beginning of mental contact with the intellectual world of the West. Certain men here and there had cast off, physically and morally, the ancient Byzantine Tartar garb. Ideas were shooting up, some originating power had shown itself, a whole programme of reform, a more extended one, as will later on appear, than that which Peter himself undertook to execute, had been sketched out.¹

The dawn of the new day was blushing in the sky; but the growing light fell only on a chosen and restricted circle. Tsar Alexis did not, like Ivan, put out artists' eyes, on the plea of thus preventing them from reproducing their masterpieces; but when Tsar Michael took it into his head to engage the services of the famous Oelschläger (Olearius), there was talk of throwing the 'sorcerer' into the river, the court mutinied, and the city was in an uproar. Another foreigner, who entertained some prominent Russian lords at dinner, saw them, to his astonishment, lay violent hands on everything on the table, and fill their pockets!² Within the Kreml, after the Poles and mock Tsars were banished, nothing changed a jot. Before Peter himself was driven out, he never saw any faces but those of his immediate circle. When he went to church, or to the bath, a double row of dwarfs, carrying red silken curtains, followed him, a moving prison, always with him.³ The child was almost stifled. At Préobrajenskoïé he began to breathe again. One day—back in the open air at last, and free to move about at will—he will wander to the banks of the Iaouza, and once he has seen the *Sloboda*, he will not care to leave it. He will call all Russia to follow him thither.

But dark times are before him yet,—the supreme test and ordeal of the Asiatic system.

¹ This point of view has led certain historians into paradoxical exaggeration. V. Klioutchewski, *Lessons in History given at the Moscow University, 1887-1889* (lithographed). I owe my knowledge of this work to the kindness of Mr. Sichukin, a young Russian savant living in Paris, to whom I hereby beg to tender my grateful thanks.

² Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 112.

³ Kotoshihin, *Russia during the Reign of Alexis* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 19.

IV

In 1682 Féodor, eldest son and successor of Alexis, died childless. Who was to be his heir? Since the death of the last descendant of Rurik (1598) the throne had almost always been won by a revolution. Boris Godunof gained it by a series of assassinations. Dimitri conquered it by Polish swords. Vassili Shuiski owed it to his election by the nobles. Michael Romanof to the voice of the people. Although some shadow of dynastic title grew out of this last selection, the accession of Alexis is believed to have been preceded by an appeal to popular suffrage.

Of Féodor's two younger brothers, one, fifteen years old,—Ivan, the son of the Miloslavski,—was sickly, three parts blind, and more than half an idiot. A communication addressed in 1648 to the ministers of Louis XIV. mentions a 'growth on the eyelids, which prevents the young Prince from seeing anything, unless they are lifted up.' The great dignitaries of the Crown pronounced unanimously in favour of Peter, the son of the Naryshkin, younger than his brother by some five years. They shrank, so they averred, from being converted from court officials into sick-nurses. Doubtless the youth of the second brother gave them fair hope of a longer period of practical interregnum, during which they might continue to wield power. They swept the boyards, who chanced to be present at Féodor's death, and the patriarch Joachim, who had given him the last sacraments, along with them. Here, as in Poland, a vacancy on the throne conferred a sort of intermediate sovereignty on the Head of the Church. Thus, in 1598, the patriarch Job ensured the triumph of Boris. There was nothing legal in what happened then, any more than in what took place now. The prelate harangued the officers and courtiers who chanced to be within the Kreml, and made a brief appeal for their votes, which were given by acclamation. The improvised electors appeared outside the palace, on the Red Staircase, before the crowd attracted by the rumour of the great events which had set the Court aflame. A name flung to the mob,—and the thing was done. Russia had a Tsar, and that Tsar's name was Peter.

Not a word of Ivan. Not an attempt to justify the

violence done, in his person, to all the laws of heredity. The *coup* was nothing, in fact, but a victory won by the Naryshkin over the Miloslavski, — taken by surprise, no doubt, and left defenceless, by the suddenness of the crisis, and the swiftness of the denouement. An ephemeral triumph, indeed, which scarcely lasted a month. On the very morrow of defeat, the vanquished faction re-entered the lists, backed by two unforeseen allies, two new political factors, destined to change the whole face of the struggle—the Tsarevna Sophia, and the *Streltsy*.¹

¹ Sumarokof, *Der Erste Aufstand der Strelitzen* (Riga, 1772), p. 10.

CHAPTER II

THE TSAREVNA SOPHIA

- I. The *terem* of the Kremlin—Moscow and Byzantium—Memories of Pulcheria—By the Tsar's death-bed—Ambition and Love—Vassili Galitzin.
- II. The *Streltsy*—Their greatness and their downfall—Soldiers and Merchants—Symptoms and causes of revolt—Popular movements—Sophia and Galitzin desire to use the revolt to conquer power—The Kremlin besieged—Three days of carnage—Sophia's bloodstained power—Peter's downfall—Ivan's enthronement—A twin throne—The Regent.
- III. The real Regent—An Idyll, and a domestic Drama—Dreams for the future—The stumbling-block.
- IV. The childhood of Peter the Great—Exile—Open-air life—Studies and games—The Astrolabe—The English boat—Soldier and Sailor—Préobrajenskoïé camp, and the Lake of Péreïaslavl—His companions—The first-fruits of reform—Rough models of an Army, a Navy, a Society.
- V. Youth—Marriage—Eudoxia Lapouhine—Early widowhood—Peter returns to his pleasures—Swept on by the current—The maker carried away by his work—The instrument of a party—Aristocratic opposition—Peter its leader—Betwixt two civilisations—Roman Europe and Protestant Europe—The choice—Preparation for the struggle—The convulsion.

I

IN 1682, seven of Alexis' daughters were still living. One alone, Sophia, has left a name in history. Born, like Ivan, of the Miloslavski consort, she had already reached her twenty-sixth year. I have alluded to her beauty; certain Russian writers, notably Sumarokof, and some foreigners even—such as Strahlenberg and Perry,—praise it very highly. None of them ever saw the Tsarevna. The testimony of the Franco-Polish diplomat, La Neuville, who had that privilege, is more conclusive. He spoils the romance in which Peter's childhood is supposed to have been mixed up, but that is no fault of mine. 'A shapeless body, monstrously fat, a head as big as a bushel measure, hair growing on her face, sores on her legs,'—so his description runs. The Little-Russian historian, Kostomarof, tries to

soften matters. Foreigners, he hints, might think Sophia ugly, but she may still have possessed great charm for the Muscovites of her own time. Excessive corpulence, even as in the East at the present day, was not likely to offend their taste. But the silence, on this point, of the Monk Miedviédief, the Princess's confidant and devoted servant, coupled with his persistent praise of her moral qualities, is very significant.

On this latter question, every one, even La Neuville, seems agreed. 'She is as acute, subtle, and shrewd in mind, as she is broad, short, and coarse in person. And though she has never read Machiavelli, nor learnt anything about him, all his maxims come naturally to her.'

Up till the year 1682, Sophia's life had resembled, —outwardly, at all events,—that of all Russian girls of her time, aggravated, as in the case of persons of her great rank, by the increased severity of its retirement. The *terem* of the Kreml exceeded all others in this respect. It enforced solitude, minute and complicated acts of devotion, and frequent fasting. The Patriarch, and the nearest relations, were the only visitors. The physician was only admitted in cases of very serious illness. When he entered, the shutters were closed, and he had to feel his patient's pulse through a covering. The *Tsaritsa* and the *Tsarevny* passed through secret passages into the church, where the inevitable red silk curtains screened them from the curiosity of other worshippers. In 1674, two young lords, Butourlin and Dashkof, turning the corner of one of the inner courts of the palace, came suddenly upon a carriage, in which the *Tsaritsa* was driving, on pilgrimage to a monastery. This accident endangered their necks. There was a searching inquiry, which even took them as far as to the torture-chamber. The princesses had no allotted place in any of the solemnities, which, in the case of the rest of the Court, occasionally broke the hideous monotony of a life bound by rigid and unchanging etiquette. They never appeared, except at funerals, when they followed the bier, always impenetrably veiled. The nation knew nothing of them, save their names, spoken daily in the prayers of the official liturgy. They knew nothing of it—nothing, so to speak, of human life, beyond the narrow circle within which fate had imprisoned them. Unable, on account of their rank, to

marry any subject, debarred, by their religion, from alliance with any foreign prince, they were doomed never to know love, nor marriage, nor maternity. So the law willed it.

Probably, even at that date, some compromise was admitted. Otherwise Sophia would certainly never have been able to play, and at a moment's notice, the part in which we shall shortly see her appear. On 27th April 1682, Peter was proclaimed Tsar. On the 23rd of the following month, a revolt of the *Streltsy* had overthrown his sole rule, and associated his brother Ivan with him on the throne. Everything points to the fact that Sophia was the arch inspirer of this *coup d'état*—nay, more, that, for the most part, it was her handiwork.

The *terem* of the Kreml must have felt the direct influence of Byzantine ideas, with all that historic mingling of asceticism and intrigue, which made up the life of the Lower Empire. Sophia and her sisters, watching by the bedside of their dying brother, must have called up memories of Pulcheria, the daughter of Arcadius, who seized the reins of power during the minority of Theodosius, and held them after his death, with the help of Martian, chief of the Imperial Guard. Some beating of wings against that barred cage there must have been,—body and soul alike rising in revolt, some dreams of liberty and love. Here, as elsewhere, doubtless, most palace revolutions had their source in such hidden emotions. Sophia certainly saw some male faces within the Kreml, besides that of the Patriarch, or even those of her near kinsmen, the Miloslavski,—energetic men, but dull-minded. Féodor, who kept his bed long before the end, needed a woman's care. A member of his immediate circle was ready to incite him to break the *terem* rule, by taking his nurse from within its walls, and to recommend Sophia to his notice. That man was Vassili Galitzin.

A remarkable man, in more ways than one. In contemporary Russian history, in Peter's own life-history, he marks a period. Better, because more clearly than Matvičief, he indicates that slow preparation, that intellectual and moral evolution, the extent of which may indeed have been exaggerated since—but which certainly did precede the appearance of the great Reformer, and rendered his work possible. He personifies that *élite* of which I have already spoken, amongst whom such men as Morozof,

Ordin Nashtshokin, and the Patriarch Nicone himself, had already, in preceding reigns, inaugurated a new period, an era of revolution. After playing an important part, for several years, in the government of his country, Vassili was concerned in the abolition of the *Miestnitchestvo*—an essentially Asiatic custom, in virtue of which no subject of the Tsar could occupy, with regard to a fellow-subject, any position inferior to that which one of his forebears might have occupied, in relation to an ancestor of the said fellow-subject—thus forming an insurmountable obstacle to any wise selection by merit, an endless source of wrangling, whereby the action of the Government was much enfeebled.

He thought of organising a regular army. According to La Neuville, he carried his plans for the future further yet, and had dreams—far beyond anything Peter dared attempt—of freeing the serfs, and making them peasant proprietors. Father Avril himself, in spite of his having been detained in Moscow, and prevented from going to China, during the period when the future Regent was all-powerful, pays homage to his liberal-mindedness. The other boyards, in their hatred for Catholicism, overruled their colleague's decision.¹

Galitzin spoke and wrote Latin with elegance and ease. He was constantly in the German suburb, and was in close relations with its inhabitants; he received Gordon the Scotchman at his own table, and was himself attended by a German doctor, Blumentrost. The Greek, Spafari, who constantly appears in his circle, and who, by his favour, held a prominent position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Posolskii Prikaz*), was quite a modern type of courtier-like diplomacy, and cosmopolitan experience, who had travelled the whole of Europe, and into China, who drew out plans for the navigation of the great Asiatic rivers, and corresponded with Witsen, the Burgomaster of Amsterdam.

Galitzin's palace, within and without, bore every resemblance to an important European dwelling, full of valuable furniture, Gobelins tapestries, pictures, tall mirrors. He had a library of Latin, Polish, and German books. This library was later to contain the manuscripts of Krijanitch, a Servian, and apostle of reforms, to whom Peter, very probably, may have owed his inspiration. He had three thousand houses built in Moscow, and even built a stone

¹ *Voyage en divers pays de l'Europe* (Paris, 1692), p. 314.

bridge,—the first ever seen in the country,—for which a Polish monk supplied the plan. He had a passionate affection for France, and caused his son constantly to wear a portrait of Louis XIV.¹

His fall, and Peter's accession, ensuing on it, are honestly held by La Neuville, to be a catastrophe for civilisation. He did indeed still cling, to a certain extent, to the era he was striving to abolish. He was not free from superstition. He put a peasant, whom he suspected of trying to cast an evil spell on him, to the torture.² He was accused, in later days, of having tried to gain Sophia's favours by means of a love-philter, and of having caused the man who prepared the potion to be burnt.³ But Peter himself was not altogether free from weaknesses of this kind. Take him altogether, this man, who was to end by being one of the young Tsar's adversaries, began by being his worthy forerunner.

Born in 1643, Vassili Galitzin was thirty-nine years old when Féodor's illness brought him into Sophia's company. He was married, with tall children of his own. With him there stood, beside the dying man's pillow, Simon Polotski, a Little-Russian priest, a man of great knowledge for those times, Silvester Miedviédief, a learned monk, a bibliographer and court poet, and Hovanski, a soldier, much favoured by the *Streltsy*. Thus a political group, the elements of which may have previously drawn together, and fused in the dark shadow, was here assembled. Miedviédief was the soul of the combination, but Galitzin held the foremost place by Sophia's side, and held it by the power of love.

The Tsarevna was twenty-five, and, to La Neuville's eyes, looked forty. Naturally hot-blooded and passionate, she had never, as yet, felt the full current of life; and when, at one and the same moment, her mind and heart awoke, she cast herself into the stream fearlessly, furiously,—surrendered herself utterly to the mighty flood which carried her along with it. Ambition came to her with love. She naturally associated the man without whom success would have had no charm for her, with her ambitious projects. She incited him, more than he her, to scale the heights of fortune they might share together. Personally, he appears to us timid,

¹ Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiv. p. 97. Avril, p. 296.

² Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs* (Tazykop edition), p. 21.

³ Oustrialof, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. ii. pp. 48, 344.

suspicious, irresolute—he soon gives signs of dizziness and distress. He would even draw back at the supreme moment, but for Miedviédief and Hovanski. Miedviédief spurs the conspirators onward, inspires them with his own passion, his own feverish love of combat. Hovanski supplies the formidable weapon he needs, for the successful carrying out of his designs.

II

In 1682 the *Streltsy*—called into existence by Ivan the Terrible and his companion in arms, Adashef—had but a short record and a somewhat tarnished glory behind them. Yet, such as it was, they had contrived to turn it into a capital, on which they lived in liberal fashion. Free men, all of them, soldiers from father to son, they formed a privileged military class, in the midst of the general servitude, and their very privileges had won them an importance quite out of proportion with their natural business and service. They were lodged, equipped, and paid by the state, in times of peace, while other free men were forced to serve unpaid, and at their own charges, even in time of war. They had a special administration of their own, and a separate commandant, who was always an important boyard. In times of peace they kept order in the streets, did patrol duty, furnished sentries, and guards of honour, and served as firemen. One regiment of picked men (*Stremiannyi*), ('the spur regiment') attended the Tsar whenever he went beyond the city walls. In war time the *Streltsy* formed the vanguard and the backbone of his army. There were twenty regiments at Moscow, eight hundred to one thousand men in each, distinguished by the colour of their uniforms—red, blue, or green kaftans with broad red belts, yellow boots, and velvet fur trimmed caps,—and a varying number in the provinces. Their military duties not filling all their time, they went into trade and manufactures; and, seeing they paid neither licence nor taxes, they easily grew rich. Hence many well-to-do burgesses of Moscow prayed for leave to be inscribed upon their lists, but they were an exclusive set, and would have no intruders.¹

It was to them that Boris Godunof owed his victory

¹ Oustrialof, vol. i. p. 17, etc. Berg, *The Reign of Tsar Flodor* (Petersburg, 1829), vol. ii. p. 36, etc. Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands* (Gotha, 1846-1860), vol. iv. p. 1, etc.

over the *Samozvaniets* Dimitri; under Tsar Michael, they captured Marina Mnischez and her last partisan, Zaroutski; they took Smolensk from the Poles under Alexis, and defended Tshiguirin against the Turks, under Féodor. During the long internal and external crisis of the seventeenth century, they constantly took sides with the regular power, they conquered Rasin, the rebel Cossack, and practically saved the monarchy; but the troubles of that time reacted on them, set up the ferment of agitation in their ranks.

Idleness completed the work of corruption. These natural champions of order had, for some time before the period of which I write, been making common cause with insurgents of all kinds, even giving the signal for riots. Riots, among the lower classes, had indeed become the order of the day. Official greed and corruption, and all their consequent abuses, had revolted the popular soul. Here, too, in this half-formed society, face to face with a rotting State, the way was prepared for Peter's coming. Though with less cause for complaint, the *Streltsy* raised their voices above those of all other grumblers. Their soldierly qualities, as was soon to be proved, had become, and were to remain, less than indifferent. But they were terrible brawlers. A day of tempest was to convert them, ere long, into the fiercest of ruffians. Alarming symptoms were evident among them before Féodor's death. The regiment of Siemion Griboiédof rose against its colonel, accusing him of peculation;—of stealing their pay and forcing them to work on the building of a country house of his, on Sundays. Thanks to the weakness of the Government, standing between a dying Sovereign, and heirs still in their childhood, the contagion spread. When the Naryshkins came to power with Peter, they found sixteen regiments in a flame. Sorely puzzled, they sent for the exiled Matviéief, the founder of their fortunes, the experienced statesman; and, pending the arrival of their saviour, they sacrificed the colonels of the regiments. The *pravieje*, a punishment reserved for insolvent debtors, was applied. Before the assembled troops, the incriminated officers were beaten with rods on the fleshy parts of their legs, until they disgorged all their really, or presumed, ill-gotten gains. This torture lasted many hours, but did not kill the colonels. But all discipline was destroyed, and the wild beast thus unmuzzled in the ranks of this

Pretorian Guard, only waited the appearance of an easy prey to make its spring and use its claws. Sophia and her councillors offered it the Naryshkin party.

The stroke was prepared, the insurrection planned, swiftly and boldly,—cynically too, almost openly. The Tsarevna's uncle, Ivan Miloslavski, denounced in later years by Peter as the chief author of the shameful deed, and hunted by him with savage hatred to his grave, made himself desperately busy, spreading lying tales, fanning the flames of rage. There was a story that the Naryshkins had poisoned Féodor, that they were ill-using Peter's elder brother, the dispossessed Tsarevitch, that one of the family desired to mount the throne. A Naryshkin, followed by a troop of armed men, was seen ill-treating the wife of one of the *Streltsy*. He was an agent of the Miloslavski in disguise. Feodora Rodinitsa, a confidant of Sophia's, went about the streets, slipped even into the soldier's quarters, sowing venomous words, and coin, and promises, broadcast.

But the conspirators awaited their pre-arranged signal, Matviéief's arrival. The *Streltsy*, perfect in their part, welcomed their former chief, and lulled his suspicions to rest. On May 11th, 1682, a deputation from the twenty regiments brought him bread and salt. 'Honey on a dagger's point,' said, later, the son of the unhappy old man, condemned, doomed to his death, at that very moment. Four days later, at dawn, the alarm sounded in all the *Streltsy* quarters, the twenty regiments flew to arms, and the Kreml was besieged. The gay-coloured kaftans had been put aside for the nonce, and the *Streltsy* all wore their red shirts, with sleeves rolled elbow high,—fell sign of the work for which they had risen so early. Soldiers they were no more,—judges rather, and executioners. They had drunk deeply before starting, and wild with brandy, even before they grew mad with carnage, they yelled in fury, brandishing their halberts. They believed, or feigned it, that Ivan and Peter himself had been assassinated, and professed to desire to avenge their deaths. In vain were the Tsar and the Tsarevitch brought out to them, safe and sound, on the top of the Red Staircase. Desperate efforts were made to appease them, but they would hear nothing, recognise no one; louder and louder they yelled, 'Death to the assassins.' The head of their own *prikaz* (office of management,—*department*), the aged

Dolgorouki, came out upon the steps to call them to order. Instantly two or three bolder spirits climbed the stairway, clutched the old man, and threw him into space, while others held up their pikes to catch him as he fell. '*Lioubo! Lioubo!*' 'that's good, that pleases us,' shouted the mob. The massacre had begun. It lasted three days. Sought out one by one, hunted through the palace, tracked into the neighbouring houses, into churches,—the councillors and relatives of Nathalia, Matviéief, all the Naryshkins, shared Dolgorouki's fate. Some were slowly tortured to their end, dragged by their hair across the squares, knouted, burnt with red-hot irons, chopped up piecemeal, at last, with halbert strokes. Nathalia made a desperate struggle before giving up Ivan, her favourite brother. He finally surrendered, of his own free will, at the prayer of old Prince Odoievski, sacrificing his life for those of his family, which the savage *Streltsy* undertook to spare. After having partaken of holy communion, in one of the churches within the Kreml, he issued forth, clasping like a shield, in that supreme moment, a sacred Icon. Instantly the image was dashed from his grasp, and he sank in the sea of blood and fury which still beat against the walls of the old palace. It raged further yet, dashing over the town, lapping round private dwellings and public edifices, wandering hither and thither in search of the supposed accomplices of an imaginary crime, sacking and murdering everywhere as it went. The rioters even fell upon the city archives, and here we may discern a political intention—the desire to endue their excesses with a popular character,—an impression existed at the time that their object was to destroy all documents bearing on the institution of serfdom.

And Sophia? Historians have essayed to clear her from personal responsibility.¹ This is all against the evidence. Never was the maxim, *Is fecit cui prodest*, better applied. Many vanquished there were, in those terrible days. One conqueror alone appears, Sophia. So thoroughly does she control the movement that she stops it, dams it up, the instant she is so minded. A few words from Tsikler, a mere lay figure, suffice to restrain the most furious of the rioters. This Tsikler will be seen, on the very morrow of the convulsion, in the Tsarevna's immediate circle. The

¹ Aristof, *Disturbances at Moscow, during the Regency of Sophia* (Warsaw, 1871).

most important posts, too, fall to her former friends Hovanski, Ivan Miloslavski, Vassili Galitzin. After the hunt the quarry is divided. She takes her own share as a natural right. Peter still remaining titular Sovereign, she holds his power, as *de facto* Regent, till more come to her. Finally, she gives those who have done her such good service their reward. To the *Streltsy*, ten roubles each for their pains, and, though the goods of their victims, which they claim, are not given them openly, means are found to afford them satisfaction, by putting the property up for sale, and reserving them the right of purchase. They are tenderly treated, for they will soon be needed afresh. And on May 23rd they are at the Kreml again, clamouring to have Ivan associated with Peter on the throne, which, thus divided, will be more easily held in subjection. Measures have been already taken to have the Patriarch and a few boyards at hand, there is talk of Joseph and Pharaoh, of Arcadius and Honorius, of Basil and Constantine. Michael and Philaretus, whose sovereignty left unpleasing memories behind it, are entirely overlooked. There is another mock election, and the famous double-seated throne is set up. Even this does not suffice. Ivan, infirm, an idiot, must have precedence. More rioting, yet another sham elective assembly. This time Sophia casts off the mask completely. When Ivan is proclaimed chief Tsar, the rioters are feasted, and the Tsarevna does the honours. Their hands, like their shirts, are bloodstained still, but she pours wine for them with her own. They prove their gratitude by returning on the 29th of May, and conferring on her the title of Regent.

III

She has gained the summit at last; but her sole object in reaching it, at the price of so many crimes, has been to taste the delights of power with, and through, the chosen one of her heart. All others must bow before him. Her will is that *he* should command. During her seven years of regency the real master of Russia—the real Regent—is Vassili Galitzin.

The Tsarevna's virtue, like her political honesty, has found defenders; but the amorous Princess has herself undertaken the task of enlightening us upon the point, and

giving the facts their true historical values. Five years have gone by. She reigns at the Kremlin, and Galitzin is bringing a disastrous Crimean campaign—she alone believes it to have crowned him with laurels—to its close. Within a short time he is to be with her at Moscow, and she writes—*‘Batiushka*, my hope, my all, God grant thee many years of life. This is a day of deep gladness to me, for God our Saviour has glorified His name, and His Mother’s, by thee, my all! Never did divine grace manifest itself more clearly. Never did our ancestors see greater proof of it. Even as God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, so has He led us across the desert by thy hand! Glory be to Him, who has showed us His infinite mercy by thee! What can I do, oh my love, to fitly recompense thy mighty toil! Oh my joy, oh delight of my eyes! Dare I really believe, oh my heart, that soon I shall see thee again, who art all the world to me? That day will be a great one to me, which brings thee once more to my side, oh my soul! if that were possible I would recall thee now, in a few moments, by some magic invocation. Thy letters all come safely, by God’s mercy. The news of the battle of Perekop arrived on the 11th. I was making a pilgrimage that day, on foot, to the monastery of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (*Vozdvizhenski*). Just as I neared the convent of St. Sergius, thy messenger joined me. I hardly know how the rest of my journey was accomplished. I read as I walked along. How shall I prove my gratitude to God, to His Blessed Mother, to the merciful Saint Sergius, worker of miracles? Thou biddest me give alms to the convents, I have loaded them all with gifts. I have gone on pilgrimage to every one, on foot, as to the first. The medals are not ready yet. Have no care for them; the moment they are ready I will send them. Thou wouldst have me pray? I do pray, and God, who hears me, knows how I long to see thee, oh my world, oh my soul! I trust in His mercy, which will grant me to see thee soon, oh all my hope! As for the army, thou shalt decide as thou wilt. For myself, I am well, thanks, doubtless, to thy prayers; all here are well. When God shall permit me to see thee again, I will tell thee all, oh all my world! thou shalt know my life, my occupations; but do not delay, come,—yet do not hurry over much, you must be weary. What shall I do to reward you for everything, and above all

others? No other would have done what thou hast done ; and thou hast spent so much pains before thou couldst succeed.¹ SOPHIA.

This letter, though not precisely modelled on the style of Mlle. Scuderi's heroines, is none the less conclusive. If La Neuville is to be believed, Sophia would have made no difficulty about bestowing the reward of which she held her hero worthy. But there was an obstacle to this expression of her transports of gratitude,—an obstacle called the Princess Galitzin ; and, unluckily, the hero refused to do what was necessary to get rid of it,—feeling naturally bound to her in honour, besides that he had received a great dowry with her, and that his children by her were far dearer to him than those he had by the Princess (*the Tsarevna*), whom he only cared for on account of her fortune.' Yet, the chronicler proceeds, 'Women are ingenious, she (Sophia) contrived to persuade him (Galitzin) to induce his wife to become a nun, which done, according to Muscovite law, any husband, on the excuse of the physical impossibility of his remaining in celibacy, could obtain permission to marry again. The good lady having freely consented, the Princess counted fully on the success of her plans.'²

She was reckoning without another barrier, which rose suddenly between her and what had looked like the approaching realisation of her dearest hopes.

IV

As may well be imagined, the son of Nathalia Naryshkin played a merely passive part amidst the terrible convulsions which more than once shook the heavy diadem of Ivan the Terrible on his young brow, and filled his eyes with bloody visions. Flattering legends have indeed pictured him, as startling the world, by a courage beyond his years, braving assassins, and driving them back under the fire and majesty of his glance. At the same time his opening genius, no less precocious, threw the exploits of Pic de la Mirandola quite into the shade. He is described, at three years old, as commanding a regiment, and present-

¹ Published by Oustrialof, vol. i. p. 383.

² Despatch from the French Agent, La Vie, dated Nov. 10, 1718, quoting Peter's own words, in confirmation of these details (Foreign Office, Paris).

ing reports to his father. At eleven, under the tuition of a Scotchman, Menesius, he has sounded all the mysteries of military art, and has adopted personal and generally innovating views, concerning several. I value legends, but I do not shrink from the necessity of contradicting them when they seem historically incorrect. In this matter they are completely so. Physically, and intellectually, the great man's development would, as a matter of fact, appear to have been somewhat slow. The colossus had some trouble in getting on its legs: at three years old, he had not parted from his wet nurse; at eleven he could neither read nor write. The baby strategian and his regiment (*Pietrof-Polk*), on the subject of which another, and in most respects well-informed, historian, in what is otherwise a curious study, complacently dwells, are a pure and simple fiction.¹ I go further: never, even at a more advanced age, does Peter give signs of great natural courage. He is far too nervous, too easily excited; his first appearances on the stage which was to ring with the sound of his exploits, had nothing heroic about them. Courage, like wisdom, came to him late, and both were the result of one and the same effort of a will strengthened by repeated trials. The terrible experiences, the anguish, the terrors, which assailed his youth, left an indelible mark on his character and temperament;—an evident proneness to the easy disturbance of the physical and moral faculties, by any violent shock,—an instinctive recoil of his whole being, in face of danger,—an inclination to bewilderment, and loss of self-control. His will takes the upper hand at last, and nature, once conquered, is all the better servant; but there the nature is, always, and unchanging. Hence, Peter will all his life be a timid man, and for that very reason, a violent one as well,—with a violence not invariably conscious, and frequently calculated, like that of Napoleon, but absolutely unreflecting, breaking away, momentarily, from the control of his reason and his will. This defect, to which I have already referred, this brand of the cripple, he will carry with him all his life, graven in his flesh;—the fierce expression of his harsh imperious features twisted by a sudden convulsion. It has been said that an attempt to poison him thus left its mark; whether the poison were physical or moral matters little, its effect is the im-

¹ Zabiclin, *The Childhood of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1872).

portant matter. The venom instilled into the poor child's veins, when the *Streltsy* drew his little feet through his uncle's blood, seems to me the most probable of the two.

He was frightened, as any child in his position would have been frightened; he hid himself, no doubt, in his mother's skirts, and once more, without a shadow of regret, he left the dreary palace, peopled with horrible nightmares. For Sophia's triumph condemned him to fresh exile—both him and his,—put him outside the law, at least, and, happily for him, outside the common rule. Exile, for this ten-year-old Sovereign who was to grow up such an extraordinarily turbulent man, meant room to stretch his limbs, air to breathe, health for body and mind; exile here stands for freedom.

He makes the most of it. He does, indeed, return to the Kreml, on days of high ceremony, to take his seat on the twin-throne, specially ordered in Holland—still to be seen in the Moscow Museum—but these are but transitory appearances. The rest of the time is spent at Préobrajenskoïé, free from all the servitude and constraint of etiquette and sovereignty, and nothing could suit him better. It must not be forgotten that he is connected, on the maternal side, with a hotbed of relative independence. When Nathalie first arrived at the Kreml, her half Scotch habits caused a scandal. Did she not even dare to lift a corner of the curtain that screened her carriage window? On his mother's side, too, he is linked to a centre of European culture, but fate has willed his separation from the Greco-Latin-Polish School, the influence of which has hitherto prevailed in Russia. The representatives of this school, led by Miedviédief, all belong to Sophia's party. One of his tutors, Zotof, who also belonged to it, was forced to flee, and never was replaced. Left to himself, the child follows his own fancy, leaning instinctively to foreigners. Thus he learns many things, but hardly anything of military matters. He will never be a great soldier, his mind is too practical, I would even say too *bourgeois*. He is described, at an early age, as having laid the *Oroujennaïa palata*, the court arsenal, under contribution. But this seventeenth century Muscovite arsenal is only military in name. It really is a sort of Eastern bazaar; Peter sends there for watches, which he amuses himself by taking to pieces, and horticultural imple-

ments, the use of which he has explained to him. People have chosen to exaggerate the extent of his boyish curiosity.¹ Let us take any child—a fairly gifted one, of course—with a bright intelligence, let us suppose him absolutely removed from the ordinary course of systematic education, and at the same time perfectly free to satisfy the needs of his awakening intelligence, and his naturally active imagination. His instinctive desire for knowledge will evidently turn in a great variety of directions. Peter is an *αὐτοδίδακτος*, as a diplomat in his service, writing to Leibnitz, later expressed it.²

It does not in the least follow that he was a precocious student. His exercise-books are still in existence; at the age of sixteen, his writing was bad, his orthography lamentable, and he had not progressed beyond the two first rules in arithmetic. His tutor, the Dutchman, Franz Timmermann, had some trouble, himself, in working out a sum in multiplication by four figures. It should be added that in his lessons, arithmetical problems alternated with theorems of descriptive geometry.³

We who have a regular process of scholastic training, invariably and systematically graduated, shrink from seeing an order of intellectual progress to which we are accustomed, and which may after all be merely arbitrary, thus inverted. But such inversions are frequent, in less precise and rule-bound intellectual spheres than ours.

It is a mere chance, too, which interested Peter, at this early age, in a class of studies which have but little charm for most very young minds. In 1686 his attention was accidentally drawn in conversation to a wonderful instrument brought back by Prince James Dolgorouki, from a journey abroad. With this instrument, he heard, distances might be measured without moving a step. Nothing of the sort had ever yet been seen in the *Oroujènnaiā palata*. And forthwith the astrolabe was sent for. Alas! Dolgorouki came back empty-handed, the instrument had disappeared from his house—stolen, no doubt. Luckily, the Prince was

¹ Nastrof, *The Early Education of Peter I. (Russian Archives, 1875)*, vol. ii. p. 470. Comp. Pogodin, *Early Years of Peter the Great (Moscow, 1875)*, p. 17, etc.

² Baron Urbich, 16th Nov. 1707, in Guerrier's *Leibnitz in seinen Beziehungen zu Russland (Leipzig, 1873)*, vol. ii. p. 71.

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 439, *Cabinet of Peter I. (Imperial Archives)*, section i. Book 38.

upon the point of starting once more for the countries where such wonders grew. Sophia and Galitzin were sending him to Louis XIV., to ask his help against the Turks. The Most Christian King gave the Ambassador the reception he might have expected, but the astrolabe was purchased. When it reached Peter's hands, he was sorely puzzled, not knowing how to use it. Somebody mentioned Timmermann, and the Dutchman, who had been building houses in the German quarter, became mathematical tutor at Préo-brajenskořé.

Peter had neither time nor wish—nor, with such a master, had he the means—to make great progress in this branch of knowledge. In his case, the astrolabe was evidently, and simply, the accidental manifestation of that instinct of touching everything, which is at the bottom of all childish natures. Doubtless, the excessive prominence, in his character, of this itching curiosity, is in many ways unusual, and denotes not only a particularly formed and serious-minded nature in the child himself, but also the existence of very special external circumstances which influenced his mind. His ultimate destiny made it necessary that, in the surroundings amongst which he was placed, the things which should most powerfully attract his intelligence, ever on the alert for new sensations—the most attractive, the most *curious* things—should also be the most useful and instructive points in the new world, full of wonders, with which the circle of his own existence was beginning to find contact.

For, it is clearly improbable—all legends notwithstanding—that at ten years old, or even at sixteen, the future reformer should have realised the advantage Russia would find, one day, in being governed by a Prince who could ply *fourteen* different trades. *Fourteen* is the number hallowed by tradition; but Peter never learnt fourteen trades. He did study and practise a few, such as turning and dentistry, without apparent profit to any one at all. By this dispersal of his attention, in spite of the breadth of an eminently comprehensive intelligence, he ran the risk of superficiality—and he did not escape it. In later years, following the example of his peers, and converting his natural inclinations into reasoned aptitudes, he will perceive that to say to his subjects (a lazy, ignorant, and awkward-handed nation), 'Do this or that, bestir yourselves, learn!' has less effect on them, than the

powerful example of his own action. On principle, therefore, but also and always by taste, by instinct, by temperament, and in obedience to the pressure of the atmosphere around him, he will go on bestirring himself, gathering up here and there, pell-mell, and at random, every sort of knowledge, every kind of facility, working everywhere, and on every undertaking, with his own hands. And these same influences, again, drive him, early in life, into the only line in which he succeeds in becoming a good practical, if not a master-hand, at the same time providing him with an inexhaustible source of pleasure, if not of positive and enduring benefit, to himself, and to his country.

Every one knows the story,—amplified and adorned, of course, by the tellers,—of the old English boat, found in the village of Ismaïlof, in a store of cast-off possessions, once belonging to the great-uncle of the young hero, Nikita Ivanovitch Romanof. The legend, ingenious to the last, will have it that Peter, as a child, had such a horror of water, that he grew pale and trembled at the sight of a brook. This may, perhaps, have been the mere symbolic expression of the natural difficulty felt by a landsman, an inhabitant of the hugest continent in the world, about entering into intimacy with that distant, invisible, unknown, well-nigh unattainable, element. Peter will give Russia a fleet before he gives her a sea. The whole character of his life-work—precipitate, abnormal, paradoxical—is seen in this one trait. When the old half-rotten wooden skiff, the Ismaïlof boat, attracted the child's attention, it overcame his instinctive repugnance, and confirmed him in his vocation as a sailor.

No sufficient attempt has been made to explain the presence of this boat, in a village close to Moscow, in the very centre of *terra firma*. When, some time later, Peter established a shipbuilding yard some hundreds of versts away, on the lake of Péréaslavl, he merely followed a course which had been already traced out, before him. That strange thing, a navy without a sea, was his creation, but it was not his invention. Properly speaking, indeed, he never invented anything; this will be seen, as the series of his manifold realisations is unrolled. Attempts had been made in this direction, even under the reign of Tsar Alexis; a yacht, *The Eagle*, having been built at Diedinof, on the banks

of the Oka, with the help of foreign carpenters, brought in for the purpose. Struys notices this yacht fully in his *Travels*.¹ The idea was floating in the air, confused as yet, but clearly directed towards the desired goal.

The Ismaïlof boat, like the astrolabe, at first appeared a mysterious object in Peter's eyes. The peasants, in old days, had seen it sailing against the wind,—wonderful indeed ! It was soon launched on a neighbouring pond. But how to sail it ? Timmermann was completely at a loss. Luckily the artisans, Dutchmen too, who had worked at Diedinof, had not all disappeared. A few were living in the *Faubourg*. Thus, Peter had two more teachers, Karschten-Brandt and Kort, carpenters both. They advised the removal of the boat to Péréaslavl, where there was a huge sheet of water. Peter took their advice, and set himself eagerly to work under their teaching ; but as a matter of fact, his principal occupation at that moment was that of playing truant. He did indeed learn some useful things, but chiefly he acquired habits, and inclinations,—some of them deplorable. He gained health, too, and vigour, iron muscles, a physical temperament of extraordinary toughness,—save for, and in spite of, his nervous attacks, the outcome of his hereditary stain,—and a moral organisation, of marvellous suppleness, robust, enterprising, except in those occasional moments of weakness.

He made himself friends, too,—quite a little tribe, collected at random, in his large domestic circle, in the promiscuity of his vagrant existence—grooms from the paternal stables (*koniouhy*) who rode the little horses of the country with him, barebacked,—scamps picked up in the streets. He played soldiers with them, of course, and, naturally, he was in command. Behold him then, at the head of a regiment ! Out of this childish play rose that mighty creation, the Russian army. Yes, this double point of departure—the pseudo-naval games on the lake of Péréaslavl, and the pseudo-military games on the Préobrajenskoïé drill-ground—led to the double goal,—the Conquest of the Baltic, and the Battle of Poltava.

But to realise all this, to fill up the space thus indicated, more was necessary than the passage of a unique personality, however exceptional, from childhood to ripe age ; more than

¹ Amsterdam, 1746.

the humanly possible development of an individual genius ; there must have been a concourse of immense collective forces—prepared beforehand, but motionlessly awaiting the favourable hour, the man who should know how to use them—linked to the natural effort. The hour and the man once arrived, these were to be suddenly revealed, to use the individual as much as he used them, to urge him onward, quite as much as he was to stimulate their action. The man himself was but the product of this latent energy, and thus it is that, at the proper moment, he appears, rising out of, and with, and by it.

Not only are the foundations of a fleet and an army laid, amidst the boyish undertakings, and the riotous companionships of the fiery youth. A whole new society is taking shape. All the old aristocracy, all the superannuated hierarchy of Moscow, will soon be crushed beneath the feet of the bold fellows, sprung from the stable and the kitchen, whom he will make Dukes and Princes, Ministers and Marshals. And in this again, he will only take up the broken thread of national tradition. He will improve nothing, he will merely imitate his ancestors of the pre-Mongol epoch, chiefs of a *droujina* (fighting band) who fought beside their *drouhy*, drank with them, when the work was done, and refused to turn Mohammedan because 'drinking is the Russian's joy.'

Peter will always be a convivial comrade, and a heavy drinker ; always, too, he will keep the trace, an unpleasant one in some particulars, of his taste for the comradeship of the lowest of the population ; and he will leave something of it in his work, and in the national life he fashioned. The popular habits of the period preceding his accession have since found eager apologists. Such praise should surely be extended to the private personality of the great reformer. This would be a hazardous undertaking. Uncleanly habits, coarse manners, degrading vices, the musty smell of the wine-shop, a general atmosphere of cynicism, all that is most shocking in his character, Peter picked up in the street, in the common life of his country, before the Reforms. He did wrong to keep these tastes, he did still more wrong in desiring that his subjects should keep them.

V

The Tsarina Nathalia does not appear to have realised, until very late, the dangers her son ran among such companions. She herself had others, very little better chosen, who absorbed her.

The origin of the 'pleasure' regiments (*potieshnyîc*) goes back, according to the most reliable information, to the year 1682; which fact suffices to deprive them, at the outset, of the serious character some people have attributed to them. Peter was then ten years old.¹ But in 1687, the young Tsar's military games began to take on proportions which attracted general attention. A fortress was built at Préobrajenskoïé, on the banks of the Iaouza, whence cannon was fired. The next year, the English skiff was discovered, and from that time forward, Peter, drawn to Péréaslavl by the dual attraction of fire and water, escaped all domestic control. His life, it is reported, was frequently imperilled in these sports, during which accidents frequently occurred. To put a stop to them, Nathalia hit upon a plan which seemed to her a certain one. 'Marry and change,' says a Russian proverb. She looked about for a wife for her son. He let her have her way. Unlike his future adversary, the austere Charles XII., Peter was by no means indifferent to, nor scornful of, the fair sex. On the 27th of January 1689, he led Eudoxia Lapouhin, the daughter of a prominent Boyard, to the altar. But he set the proverb at nought. Three months later, the couple had parted. He was tacking about on the lake of Péréaslavl, she, serving the apprenticeship of a widowhood which was to last all her life. Navigation has become more than a taste with the young Tsar, it is a jealous and exclusive passion. Some obscure atavism inherited from the ancient Varegians stirs his soul. He has never seen the sea,—he never ceases dreaming of it,—he will never know rest, till he has reached it. And this again is according to tradition. For two centuries, every war undertaken by his predecessors has had this object,—to reach the sea on the North-west, by driving back Poland or Sweden, or on the South-east, by driving back Turkey. Still, even for this, he will not part with his *koniouhy*. Already he plans

¹ See Oustrialof, vol. ii, p. 329; comp. *Memoirs of Matvičief* (Toumanski edition), vol. i. pp. 194-196.

strategical combinations, for using and combining the naval and land forces at his disposal ; and those same forces have grown with the youth, who has already reached a giant's stature. The toy has almost reached the proportions of a weapon. In September 1688, the young Tsar requisitions all the drums and fifes of a crack *Streltsy* regiment for his war game. In November, greatly to the displeasure of Prince Vassili Galitzin, he takes two-thirds of the effective strength of another regiment, and draws the teams for his 'pleasure' artillery from the depôt of the *konioushennyï prikaz* (stable department). There is a regular recruiting station at Préobrajenskoïé, and the grooms and cook boys are not the only recruits whose names appear on the lists. Those of 1688 contain the names of some of the greatest Muscovite families, such as Boutourlin and Galitzin.

The presence of these aristocrats is in itself an absurdity, one of those ironical surprises with which history abounds. Peter, the unconscious artisan, as yet, of a great political and social renovation, who knows not whither he goes, save that he follows his own pleasure, has become the unconscious instrument of a party pursuing a very different aim. His work is confiscated, momentarily, for the benefit of tendencies diametrically opposed to it. These new comers, who will shortly incite the future reformer to claim his stolen rights, will one day help to swell the army of the most resolute opponents of reform. But for the moment there is no question of reform—far from it. The means by which the Miloslavski, and, following them, Sophia, have ensured or obtained their power,—the abolition of the *Miestnitchestvo*, the appeal to popular insurrection,—have bound their cause up with that of the lower classes. The great nobility, that section, at least, which remains most opposed to progress,—wounded in its prerogatives and its ancient customs—has a natural tendency to rally, first round Matviéief and Nathalia, and then round Peter. So that the weapon, which amuses Peter, is, in the eyes of those who now help him to forge the blade, and sharpen its edge, destined to hasten the retaliation of conservative and anti-European ideas, on the most European-minded man Moscow has ever seen. 'Down with Vassili Galitzin' will be their war-cry. Préobrajenskoïé has simply become a natural rallying point for malcontents of every kind, and among these, the reactionaries, being the

most important, take the foremost place. Peter, himself wounded, outraged, and stripped, by the transitory *régime*, the close of which they so impatiently await, is their chosen leader, the future avenger, so they fain would hope, of the common injury.

But of this he recks not. He only cares for amusing himself. He entertains himself, at Péréaslavl, sailing boats whose canvas swells with no reforming breeze. Under cover of his name, and with his concurrence, a struggle is brewing between the silent Kreml and the noisy camp where he spends his youthful ardour. But in this game, in which his fortune and that of Russia are at stake, the only prize he sees and covets, is larger scope for his schoolboy fancies. Years must go by yet, before he finds his true path. Till that time comes, careless of where the road may lie, he will obediently follow his chance guides. On the day chosen by them, he will march to the assault of power, and will leave them the chief benefits of his victory.

Thus, he steps backwards into history, indifferent alike to his destiny and to his glory.

In July, 1689, the storm breaks.

CHAPTER III

THE MONASTERY OF THE TROÏTSA

- i. Government under the Regency—Its merits—Causes of weakness—Disappointments and bitterness—Diversion to external matters—The Crimean campaigns—Disasters—Galitzin's return—Popular indignation—Peter's party takes advantage of it—The Kreml and the Préobrajenskoïé camp—Sophia faces the storm—The conflict.
- ii. The night of the 7th of August—Attack or stratagem?—Peter's flight—The convent of the Troïtza—The Archimandrite Vincent—Boris Galitzin—The struggle is organised.
- iii. Parleys and manœuvres—Which way will the army go?—Sophia's courage—Vassili Galitzin's weakness—Defection—The Regent submits—He comes to the Troïtza—Exile—Question and torture—Sophia acknowledges herself beaten—Her cloister—The new *régime*—Peter's comrades in power—The reaction—the Future.

I

SOPHIA'S regency, justified, at all events, as it was, by Peter's youth, if not its natural outcome, might, in 1689, have still hoped to endure, more or less legitimately, for several years. Peter was barely eighteen years old, and no Russian law—like that of Charles V. in France—has advanced the hour of political maturity in the case of sovereigns. Impatient ambition may indeed endeavour to hurry the march of time. But not Peter's own ambition; he still cares so little about power, that, for many a day yet, the accomplishment of the great event will bring no change in his occupations.

The government of Sophia and of her co-Regent, inaugurating a gynecocracy which, for almost a century—from the days of Catherine I. to those of Catherine II.—was to become the general rule in Russia, does not strike me as having deserved either the criticisms, or the praises,—all of them equally exaggerated,—which have been showered upon it. Neither Voltaire, who follows La Neuville in describing the Tsarevna as a second Lucrezia Borgia, nor Karamzin, following Lévêque and Coxe, who calls her 'one of the

greatest women the world has ever seen,¹ has, in my opinion, done her justice. Among the old Russian historians, Müller in his criticisms of Voltaire's views,² Boltin in his notes of the History of Leclerc,³ and especially Emin⁴ with Aristof,⁵ among the moderns, have endeavoured, not altogether successfully, to reconcile these contradictory exaggerations.

For my part, the government seems to me to have had something exceedingly Byzantine about it. No Byzantine quality is lacking—Court intrigues, party struggles, Pretorian revolts, liturgical quarrels as to how the fingers should be crossed in prayer, how many times the word *hallelujah* should be repeated, and whether, perchance, the Trinity should not consist of four Persons, with a separate throne for the Saviour of the world. Yet, other elements appear, which raise it to a higher level. There is a continuation of that economic springtime, so to speak, already inaugurated under Alexis; a beginning too, of an intellectual spring-tide. While Galitzin was building houses in Moscow, Sophia was writing plays. She had them acted at the Kreml; she even, so some people say, acted in them herself. The policy of the regency, internal and external, lacked neither energy nor skill. It made a bold struggle against the abettors of religious quarrels, who had taken the place of the rioters of former days, and who came to the Palace, even as the *Streltsy* had once come, to seek the Patriarch, and wrangle with him. The chief of the *raskolniks*, Nikita, was put to death. It defied order with all its might, and, when the *Streltsy* claimed the right to disturb it, did not hesitate to punish its former allies. It appealed from the rebellious soldiery, to the nation at large. When the Kreml was threatened, it removed the throne into the protecting shadow of the altar. In October 1682 Sophia and Galitzin took refuge in the convent of the Troitsa.

'The Trinity,' standing some six leagues from Moscow,—the traditional refuge of the Royal house in hours of danger—still retained all the characteristics of the great Russian *Obitels*: little fortified towns with a population of monks, novices, and serving brothers, numbering their thousands,

¹ Karamzin, vol. vii. p. 293. Lévêque, *Hist. de Russie* (Paris, 1799), vol. iv. pp. 204-234.

² *Etudes*, 1750-1764.

³ St. Petersburg, 1788.

⁴ *Lives of the Russian Sovereigns* (St. Petersburg, 1767-69).

⁵ *Rebellions in Moscow during the Reign of Sophia* (Warsaw, 1871).

churches by the dozen, not to mention shops, workshops, and trades of various kinds. Boris Godunof once sought shelter there; and to this day the traces of the Polish balls which rained impotently on the ramparts of that holy spot are shown with pride. Thither, in his turn, and shortly too, Peter was to come, to crave help and protection.

The appeal of the *ad interim* government had been heard, and had procured it an army. Falling into an ambush at Vosdvijenskoïé, midway between Moscow and the Troïtza, Hovanski, now the hostile chief of the *Streltsy*, lost his head; his son shared his fate, and the rebellion, decapitated with its chiefs, collapsed.

Abroad,—in the field of diplomacy, at all events—Galitzin proved himself a faithful and fortunate exponent of the traditional policy of territorial expansion, which had gradually set the frontiers of Muscovy farther and farther back, towards the South and West. Taking skilful advantage of the difficulties into which, in spite of Sobieski's victories, their long war with Turkey had thrown the Poles, he snatched Kief out of their hands. In June, 1685, a new Metropolitan, duly installed in the ancient capital, consented to receive his investiture from the patriarch of Moscow. This was a decisive step on the road which was to lead to the recovery of the territories of Little-Russia and to the partition of the Republic.

But these successes were compromised, unfortunately, by the fatal consequences of causes connected with the very origin of the Regent's power. When Sophia and Galitzin put down the partisans of disorder and anarchy, they turned their hands against the authors of their own prosperity. Between the disappointment thus caused, on one hand, and the bitterness roused, on the other, their policy became an aimless struggle. It soon grew a hopeless one. The very next year they were at their wits' end. When the Boyards—ill-treated and deeply discontented—seemed inclined to raise their heads, a mob was brought together on the *Loubianka*, the most crowded square of the city. An anonymous document had been found there, which counselled the people to hurry in their thousands to the Church of Our Lady of Kasan, where, behind the image of the Virgin, another paper which should guide their course would be discovered. Thither the crowd repaired, and a

pamphlet, speaking evil of Sophia, and appealing to the people to rise and massacre the Boyards who supported the Tsarevna, was duly brought to light. This pamphlet, a mere farce, was the work of Shaklovityĭ, a new counsellor of Sophia's, a representative of ancient Muscovy, in the purest Byzantine style—a fierce and cunning schemer. The Tsarevna feigned terror, and her good people acclaimed her, and offered to rid her of her enemies.¹

And now, even abroad, the luck began to turn. The Regent, having promised Poland the help of the Muscovite troops against the Turks, in exchange for Kief, made two expeditions into the Crimea; this again was the traditional course. The Crimean Tartars formed a barrier between Moscow and Constantinople, which Russia was not to overthrow for another century. But there was nothing of the great general about Galitzin; in each campaign he left an army, vast military stores, and the remnants of his reputation, on the steppes. Starting for his second expedition, he found, before his palace door, a coffin, with the insulting legend, 'Try to be more fortunate!'² Returning to Moscow in June 1689, a wild clamour, yells, and threats of death saluted him. He was publicly accused of corruption; barrels of French louis d'or were said to have been openly conveyed into his tent. Meanwhile the Prĕobrajenskoïĭ camp was daily filling with new recruits, and Sophia saw the ranks of her partisans melt before her eyes. Yet she faced the storm bravely; her ambition, and her love, indeed, were at their very height. She had taken advantage of the conclusion of peace with Poland to get herself proclaimed *samodierjitsa* (autocrat), with equal rank to her brothers. This title figured, thenceforward, on all official documents, and on occasions of public ceremony the Tsarevna took her place beside her brothers, or rather beside the elder one, for Peter hardly ever appeared. She caused her portrait, with the crown of Monomachus on her head, to be engraved in Holland. At the same time, and notwithstanding that, according to certain witnesses, she had given the absent Galitzin an obscure rival, in the person of Shaklovityĭ,³ she pursued the supreme object of her early dreams

¹ Shaklovityĭ's depositions, see Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 39.

² Avril, *Voyage en divers Etats d'Europe et d'Asie*, p. 315.

³ *Kourakin Archives* (St. Petersburg, 1890-1895), vol. i. p. 55.

—her marriage with the Regent and a common throne— with ever-increasing ardour. To attain this end, she elaborated a very complicated plan, which called for the intervention of the Pope himself. Ivan was to be married, his wife to be provided with a lover so as to ensure the birth of children; Peter, thus put on one side, would be got rid of somehow. Then, tempted by a proposed reunion, to be discussed and negotiated, at any rate, between the Orthodox and the Roman Church, the Pope was to be induced to proclaim the illegitimacy of Ivan's children. The ground thus cleared, Sophia and Galitzin would only have to occupy it. Meanwhile the Tsarevna was resolved to brazen it out. While Shaklovityř, relegated by the Regent's return to the subaltern position of a partisan and a police agent, kept his eye on those few of Peter's friends who dared already to cast aside the mask, she defied public opinion, by decreeing a distribution of rewards to the companions in arms of Galitzin, whose victory she still persisted in proclaiming. Peter, well advised by those about him, refused his sanction. She did without it:—here was open conflict! Generals and officers, loaded with honours and with pensions, betook themselves to Pr obrajensko e to thank the Tsar. He refused to see them:—here was public rupture!

II

The historic night of the 7th of August 1689 closes in at last. A luminous summer night, darkened, unhappily, by the contradictions of legend and of history. This much seems tolerably clear. Peter was suddenly roused from slumber, by fugitives from the Kreml, who came to warn him that the Tsarevna had collected an armed band to attack Pr obrajensko e and put him to death. Nothing is less clearly proved than this attempt of hers, nothing indeed is less probable. The evidence of documents collected by the best informed of all Russian historians, Oustrialof,¹ would rather go to prove that Sophia neither thought, nor, at that moment, dared to think, of attacking the camp at Pr obrajensko e. She knew it to be well guarded, kept on a war footing, secure against any surprise. She rather feared, or perhaps

¹ See vol. ii, p. 56.

feigned to fear, an offensive movement on the part of these 'pleasure regiments,' full of spirit, all of them eager, longing to distinguish themselves by some bold stroke. It was a habit of hers, as we know, to feign terror, so as to give the *Streltsy* or the Moscow populace a longing to defend her. So little did she think of taking any action, that until the next morning, she knew nothing of the warning carried to her brother the night before, nor of its consequences. For months past, Préobrajenskoïé and the Kreml had both been on the *qui vive*, watching, suspecting, and accusing each other of imaginary attempts. When Sophia, in the previous month, had paid a visit to Peter in his camp, on the occasion of the Blessing of the waters of the Iaouza, she had brought three hundred *Streltsy* with her. A few days later, when Peter went to the Kreml to congratulate his aunt Anna on her fête-day, Shaklovityï posted fifty reliable men near the Red Staircase, in case of accidents.

An armed band was indeed collected within the Kreml, on that fatal night. With what object? According to Sophia's later assertion, to escort her, next morning, on a pilgrimage. Among all those soldiers, several hundreds of them, picked from the Tsarevna's most devoted followers, there were only *five* who dropped a threatening word against Peter or his mother. Two others, whose names have gone down to posterity, Mielnof and Ladoguin, thought it a good opportunity to desert, slip over to the Préobrajenskoïé camp, and ensure their welcome, by giving the alarm. Some historians have taken them for false zealots, who obeyed a watchword, given by the party instigating Peter to action.¹ This may have been. Let us get to the result, which is a certainty.

Peter begins by running away. Without thinking of verifying the reality of the danger threatening him, he jumps out of his bed, runs straight to the stables, throws himself, bare-legged, in his shirt, on to a horse, and hides himself in the neighbouring forest. A few of his *Koniouhy* join him there, and bring him clothes. Then come officers and soldiers—only a few as yet. The moment Peter sees himself surrounded, and provided with a sufficient escort, without waiting to warn his mother, his wife, or his other

¹ Pogodin, *The Early Years of Peter the Great*, pp. 183-226.

friends, he puts spurs to his horse and tears off full gallop, towards the Troïtza. He reaches it at six o'clock in the morning, tired-out in body, broken down in mind. He is offered a bed, but he cannot rest; he sheds floods of tears, and sobs aloud, terrified, anxious, asking the Archimandrite Vincent, twenty times over, whether he may reckon on his protection. This monk had long been his devoted partisan, and even his banker, in those critical moments through which the deliberate parsimony of Sophia had caused him to pass.¹ His firm and affectionate words reassured the young Tsar at last. Boris Galitzin, the Regent's cousin, Boutourlin, and the other chiefs of the Préobrajenskoïé camp, who join the fugitive at the Troïtza, do better still. The events which follow, like those already passed, give evident proof, both that measures had been taken long beforehand, by Peter's familiars, for the struggle now beginning, and that he himself was quite incapable of taking any personal initiative, or guiding part. His mind was wholly set on his lake at Péréaslavl and the boats he meant to sail there, as soon as he could build as many as he chose. He left all the rest to his friends. And he will leave them, now, full masters of the situation they have created.

Before the end of the day, the Monastery is invaded, the Tsarinas, Nathalia and Eudoxia, the *Potieshnyïé*, the *Streltsy* of the Souharef Regiment, long since won over to the younger Tsar's cause, arrive in quick succession. People who found a road so quickly, must, surely, have been prepared beforehand to take it. There is no sign of hasty conception about the measures for which Boris Galitzin forthwith assumes responsibility. Everything seems arranged and carried out according to a preconceived plan, and even the Tsar's own sudden flight, possibly a foreseen, and therefore, a prearranged event, would appear the signal designed to mark the opening of hostilities between the rival camps. As for the object of those hostilities, it is an understood thing; it scarcely would appear necessary to mention it. The fight, if fight there is, will be to decide who is the master.

¹ *Kourakin Archives*, vol. i. p. 53.

III

They began by parleying. Peter wrote to Sophia to ask for explanations concerning the nocturnal armaments at the Kreml. The Tsarevna sent an ambiguous reply. Both sides were trying to gain time. One important factor had not, as yet, taken any side in the struggle just beginning. The troops, native and foreign, the majority of the *Streltsy*, and the regiments commanded by Gordon and Lefort, had made no sign. The question was, which party they would serve. On the 16th of August, Peter makes a forward step; a *gramota* (message) from the Tsar, convokes detachments from all these troops, six men from each regiment, to attend him on the morrow. Sophia answers boldly. Her emissaries, posted at convenient spots, stop the Tsar's messengers, while another *gramota*, signed by the Regent, confines both troops and officers to their quarters, on pain of death. At first this measure seems successful; the detachments do not answer to the call, and a story is spread that Peter's *gramota* was forged. Yet slowly, insensibly, the barracks empty, while the flow of soldiers and officers, of every arm, increases at the Troitsa. Symptoms of weakness are betrayed, even by those nearest to the Tsarevna. Vassili Galitzin is the first to show the white feather. He had thought for a moment, it is believed, of going over into Poland, bringing back an army of Poles, Tartars, and Cossacks, and then facing events; but Sophia must have dissuaded him from a plan which would have separated her from her lover. Then, leaving her to her fate, he yields himself to his own, retires to his country house at Miedviedkof, three leagues from Moscow, and declares he has no further part in the government. When foreign officers come to take his orders, he gives them evasive replies,—the ir retrievable signal for general defection.

But the Regent herself will not, as yet, acknowledge that her brother has won; she knows what she has to expect from him. Already the leaders of the insurgent *Raskolniks*, crowding into the Kreml, have shouted, 'It is high time that you should take the road to the convent.' She would far rather die. She sends messengers of peace,—the Patriarch himself,—to the Troitsa. The august emissary takes the opportunity of making his private peace, and appears beside

the Tsar at a solemn reception of the deserters, officers and soldiers, whose number daily increases. Then she resolves to play her last stake, and goes herself. Midway, at the village of Vosdvijenskoïé, where, seven years before, Hovanski's head had fallen in an ambushade, Boutourlin stops her. She is forbidden to proceed, and the Boyard's armed followers load their muskets. She beats a retreat, but still stands firm, and showers caresses on the *Streltsy*, most of whom, bound by past complicity, by fear of reprisals, by the temptation of fresh reward, remain faithful to her. They swear to die for her, but, turbulent and undisciplined as ever, they appear before the Kreml on the 6th of September, demanding the person of Shaklovityï, the Tsarevna's confidant, right hand, and temporary lover, that they may give him up to Peter, desiring, so they say, to make him a scape-goat, an expiatory victim, whose punishment shall appease the Tsar's wrath, and effect a general reconciliation. She gives in at last, after a desperate resistance, and from that time it becomes evident that she can depend on nothing, nor on any person.

Shaklovityï is a terrible weapon in Peter's hands. Put to the question, under the lash, he supplies all the necessary elements of the charges which the Tsar's partisans desire to bring against Sophia and her adherents. The echo of his depositions draws Vassili Galitzin himself from his retreat, and leads him, submissive and repentant, to the Troïtza. This is the end. Peter refuses to receive him, but on the intervention of Boris, he consents to show him a measure of clemency. The ex-Regent is exiled to Kargopol, on the road to Archangel; then, farther North, to Iarensk, a lonely village, where, all his wealth being confiscated, he will only have one rouble a day to support himself and his family of five persons. There he will drag on till 1715; but the Tsar's half mercy goes no further. Shaklovityï and his accomplices, real or supposed, are condemned to death. Miedviédief, shut up at first in a monastery, after enduring the most horrible tortures, comes to the same end. The scaffold makes them all equal.

As for Sophia, her fate is what she had foreseen—a convent, with some precautionary measures to increase the severity of the punishment.

Peter's first care is to settle matters with his brother. In

a carefully composed letter, he denounces their sister's misdeeds, but denies any intention of touching his elder brother's rights, when he claimed those she had usurped from himself. He even expresses his inclination to respect Ivan's precedence; 'he will always love him, and respect him as a father.' He omits, nevertheless, to take his advice as to the treatment to be meted out to the usurper. Ivan Troïékourof, one of his early companions, is directly charged to order the Tsarevna to select a convent. After a short hesitation she too submits, and chooses the recently erected Convent of the Virgin (Novodiévitchyi,) close to Moscow. The new *régime* has begun.

It is still an intermediate *régime*. Between Ivan, who holds his peace, accepts accomplished facts, remains a mere figure-head for ceremonial occasions, and Peter, who, the tumult once hushed, disappears behind those who helped him to pass victoriously through it, and returns to his own amusements, the power falls to the real conquerors of the moment. Boris Galitzin, a Muscovite of the old stamp, the living antithesis of his cousin Vassili, begins by holding the foremost place, occupied later, when he has compromised himself and roused Naryshkin jealousy by protecting his guilty kinsman, by the Naryshkins themselves, and the other relatives of the Tsarina Mother.

The future great man's hour has not yet struck. The serious struggle into which, for a moment, he has allowed himself to be drawn, has not carried him beyond the limits of the childish era of toy armies and sham fights. Yet, apart from its immediate results, it has not failed to exercise an all-important influence on Peter's destiny, on the development of his character and of his talents. The young Tsar does indeed leave business in the hands of his former comrades, but he has found others, new comers these, who will rapidly oust the old ones from his affections, and who, if they do not actually join him in making the history of his great reign, are destined to point out the road and guide his feet upon it.

BOOK II—THE LESSONS OF THE CIVILISED WORLD

CHAPTER I

ON CAMPAIGN—A WARLIKE APPRENTICESHIP—THE CREA- TION OF THE NAVY—THE CAPTURE OF AZOF

- I. Peter's new comrades—Patrick Gordon—Francis Lefort—The nature of their influence—Lefort's house in the *Sloboda*—A Russian Casino—The fair ladies of the *Faubourg*—The Tsar is entertained—The Government of the Boyards—Reactionary spirit—Amusements at Préobrajenskoïé—Warlike sports—Pleasures—Buffoonery—The King of Presburg and the sham King of Poland—The Lake of Péréiaslavl—A fresh-water fleet—On the road to Archangel—The Sea—Death of the Tsarina Nathalia—A short mourning—Peter goes back to his pleasures.
- II. Russia's precarious position—The Tsar's weariness—He seeks diversion and distraction—A foreign journey planned—Peter desires first to earn warlike glory—Fresh campaign against the Turks—First attempt on Azof—Complete failure—Peter's genius is revealed—Perseverance.
- III. The greatness of Peter and the greatness of Russia—The result of the Mongol Conquest—Redoubled efforts—A second attempt—Repetition of the Siege of Troy—Success—Peter can face Europe—He decides on his journey.

I

THERE has been a great deal of hair-splitting as to the foreign companions who now make their appearance in Peter's circle. Facts and dates have been pretty generally mixed up on this subject, even so far as to make Patrick Gordon one of the young Tsar's confidants and instructors long before Sophia's fall, and to indicate Lefort as the organiser and principal worker in the *coup d'état* of 1689. As a matter of fact, neither came into contact with Peter till during the time of his residence at the Troïtsa, and it was

not till much later that they were admitted into his intimacy, and there played an important part. Gordon had been a follower of Vassili Galitzin. Lefort had no special position whatever.

Born in Scotland, towards 1685, of a family of small Royalist and Catholic lairds, Patrick Gordon had spent twenty years of his life in Russia, vegetating as an officer of inferior rank, and far from happy in the process. Before ever coming to Russia, he had served the Emperor, fought with the Swedes against the Poles, and the Poles against the Swedes. 'He was clearly,' say his English biographers, 'a genuine Dugald Dalgetty.'¹ All his knowledge amounted to some recollections of the village school he had attended in the neighbourhood of Aberdeen, his native county, and to his military experiences, in command of a dragoon regiment, in Germany and Poland. In 1665, Alexis, and in 1685, Sophia, sent him on diplomatic service. He thus travelled to England twice, on commissions relative to the privileges of English merchants in Russia, fulfilled his mission with success, but gained no reward save a *tcharka* (goblet) of brandy, which Peter, then a boy of fourteen, offered him, on his return from his second journey. He considered himself ill-treated, requested permission to retire, failed to obtain it, and was thenceforward inclined to make common cause with malcontents. He took part, however, in the disastrous Crimean campaigns, and there won the rank of General. But, being naturally intelligent, active, and well born, in his own country, he thought himself justified in aspiring to a yet higher position. Personally known to the Kings Charles and James of England, cousin to the Duke of Gordon, who was Governor of Edinburgh in 1686, he was the recognised chief of the Scotch Royalist Colony in the *Sloboda*. Speaking Russian, never shrinking from a bottle of wine, he was, to a certain extent, popular amongst the Muscovites themselves. His lively intelligence, his external appearance—redolent of civilisation—and his evident energy, were certain to attract Peter's attention. The Tsar was always to lean towards men of a robust temperament like his own. Patrick Gordon was, indeed, afflicted with an internal malady, which finally carried him off, but in 1697, at four-and-sixty years of age, he closes his journal with these words, 'During the last few days I have

¹ Leslie Stephen and Sydney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*.

felt, for the first time, an evident diminution of my health and strength.'¹

Francis Lefort arrived at Moscow in 1675, with fifteen other foreign officers, who, like him, had come to seek their fortune. He belonged to a family of Swiss origin, of the name of Lifforti, which had left the town of Coni, and settled at Geneva. His father was a druggist, and thus belonged to the aristocracy of trade. The women of this class had obtained leave from the Chamber of Reformation, towards the year 1649, to wear 'double woven flowered silk gowns.' At the age of eighteen, Francis departed for Holland, with sixty florins, and a letter of recommendation from Prince Charles of Courland, to his brother Casimir, in his pocket. Charles lived at Geneva: Casimir commanded a body of troops in the Dutch service. He made the young man his secretary, giving him his cast-off wardrobe, worth about three hundred crowns, and his card money, worth about fifty more per day, as salary.² This income, though large, was far from certain. Two years later, Lefort took ship for Archangel. His first thought, when he set foot on Russian soil, was to leave it as quickly as possible; but in those days, travellers could not leave the Tsar's Empire when and how they chose. Foreigners were closely watched—those who went abroad were looked at askance, as possible spies. He spent two years at Moscow, where he nearly died of hunger. He contemplated disappearing into the relatively respectable obscurity of the household of some member of the Diplomatic Corps. He wandered from the Danish envoy's antechamber, to the English Envoy's kitchen, finding no permanent position anywhere. Yet, by degrees, he won friends amongst the inhabitants of the *Sloboda*. He found some kindly protectors, and even one fair protectress, the rich widow of a foreign Colonel. In 1678 he definitely decided to settle in the country, and began by taking him a wife. This was an indispensable beginning, it being necessary, in order to disarm suspicion, to have a family and a roof-tree. He married Elizabeth Souhay, the daughter of a Metz burgher, a Catholic, with a fair fortune,

¹ Unpublished as yet, except in a German translation. The original is in the Archives of the St. Petersburg War Office. Some fragments appeared at Aberdeen in 1859, published by the Spalding Club.

² Vulliemini, *Revue Suisse*, vol. xxix. p. 330.

and good connections. Two of Madame Souhay's brothers, of the name of Bockkoven, Englishmen by birth, were highly placed in the army; Patrick Gordon was son-in-law to one of them. This fact, doubtless, induced Lefort to enter the career of arms, for which he had otherwise neither taste nor inclination.¹ It was not from these two foreigners, clearly, that Peter the Great and his army learnt what they had to learn before they won Poltava. As I have already indicated, their influence on the huge work of progress, of reform, and civilisation, which is bound up with Peter's name, was really very indirect. While it was yet in its infancy, they followed each other, in rapid succession, to the grave. For the moment, too, Peter cared for other things, and the lessons he learnt from the old Scotchman and the young Genevan had no connection with the science of Vauban and of Colbert.

Lefort now owned a spacious house on the banks of the Iaouza, elegantly furnished in the French style, which had already, for some years, been the favourite meeting-place of the denizens of the *Faubourg*. Even during his absences, they habitually gathered there, to smoke and drink. Alexis had forbidden the use of tobacco, but in that respect, as in many others, the suburb was favoured ground. Nobody could organise a merrymaking so well as the Genevan. Jovial, full of lively imagination, with senses that were never jaded, he was a master in the art of setting people at their ease, a thoroughly congenial companion. The banquets to which he invited his friends generally lasted three days and three nights: Gordon was ill after every one of them, Lefort never appeared to feel the slightest evil effect. During Peter's first foreign journey, his drinking powers astounded even the Germans and the Dutch. In 1699, in the month of February, after an unusually festive bout, he took a whim to finish his merrymaking in the open air. His folly cost him his life; but, when the pastor came to offer him the last religious consolations, he dismissed him gaily, called for wine and for musicians, and passed away peacefully to the strains of the orchestra.² He was the perfect type of the

¹ Korb, *Diarium itineris in Moscoviam* (Vienna, 1700), p. 214—Comp. Oustrialof, vol. ii, p. 13; Alex. Gordon, *History of Peter the Great*, vol. i, p. 136, vol. ii, p. 154. Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiv, p. 142. *La Biographie de Posselt*, transcribed in French by Vulliemmin (*Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort*, Frankfort, 1866), is full of curious information, but devoid of the critical quality.

² Korb, p. 119. Oustrialof, vol. iii, pp. 262, 263.

mighty reveller, a species now almost extinct, though it has left worthy descendants in Russia. Almost as tall in stature as Peter himself, and even more powerful than the Tsar, he excelled in every bodily exercise. He was a fine rider, a marvellous shot—even with the bow—an indefatigable hunter. Handsome in face, too, with charming manners; his information was very limited, but he had a polyglot talent for languages, speaking Italian, Dutch, English, German, and Slav. Leibnitz, who tried to win his favour during his stay in Germany, declares that he drank like a hero, adding, that he was considered very witty.¹ His house was no mere meeting-place for merry boon companions of his own sex. Ladies were to be seen there too, sharp-featured Scotch women, dreamy-eyed Germans, and Dutch women of ample charms. None of these fair dames bear any resemblance to the recluses of the Russian *terems*, hidden behind their iron bars and silken veils (*fatas*). Their faces are uncovered, and they come and go, laughing and talking, singing the songs of their own country, and mingling gaily in the dance. Their simpler dresses, more becoming to the figure, make them seem more attractive than their Russian sisters. Some of them are of somewhat easy morals. All this it is which first attracts and captivates the future reformer.

During the seven years of the Regency, in spite of the tendencies common to Sophia and Vassili Galitzin, the history of Russian civilisation could boast but few days marked with a white stone. The government, ill at ease in its precarious situation, tormented, harried, fighting for existence from its first day to its last, was scarcely in a position to take thought for anything, save its own existence. But during the seven years which followed on the *coup d'état* of 1689, matters, as I have already hinted, grew even worse. This was a season of anti-liberal reaction, nay more, of frankly retrograde movement. Peter did not cause, but neither did he prevent it. He had no hand in the ukase which drove out the Jesuits, nor in the decree by virtue of which Kullmann, the Mystic, was burnt alive in the Red Square. These executions were the work of the Patriarch Joachim, and indeed, up till March 1690, when he died, the government was swayed by his authority. In his will, the prelate charged the young Tsar not to bestow

¹ Guerrier, *Leibnitz in Seinen Beziehungen zu Russland*, p. 12.

military commands on heretics, and to destroy the Protestant churches in the *Sloboda*.¹ Peter was by no means inclined to obey; he even thought of providing the Patriarch with a more liberal-minded successor, in the person of Marcellus, Metropolitan of Pskof, but he lacked the power. Marcellus, so he declared, in later days, was not appointed for three reasons. First, because he spoke *barbarian tongues* (Latin and French). Secondly, because his beard was not long enough. Thirdly, because his coachman was allowed to sit on the box of his carriage instead of riding one of the horses harnessed to it. Peter was powerless. In July 1690 Gordon thus writes to one of his friends in London: 'I am still at this Court, where I have a great deal of anxiety and many expenses. I have been promised great rewards, but up to the present I have received nothing. I have no doubt that when the young Tsar himself takes the reins of government, I shall receive satisfaction.' But the young Tsar was in no hurry to take the reins of government, and indeed he never was where the interests of that government demanded his presence. Where was he then? Very frequently, after 1690, in the *Sloboda*, particularly in Lefort's house. He dined there constantly—as often as two or three times a week. Often, too, after spending the whole day with his friend, he would linger in his company till the following morning. Little by little, he brought his other boon companions with him. Soon they found themselves cramped for space, and then a palace, built of brick, replaced the favourite's former wooden house. Within it was a ball-room for 1500 persons, a dining-room hung with Spanish leather, and a yellow damask bedroom, 'with a bed three ells high, and bright red hangings'; there was even a picture-gallery.²

All this luxury was not intended for Lefort alone, nor even for Peter, who cared but little for it. The young Tsar was thus beginning a system to which he was to remain faithful all his life. At St. Petersburg, many years later, while himself lodged in a mere hut, he insisted that Menshikof should possess a yet more splendid palace. But he expected to be relieved, by him, of all court receptions and festivities. Lefort's palace, then, became, at one and the

¹ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 496.

² Vulliemmin, p. 590.

same time, a kind of auxiliary to the very shabby establishment kept up by the Sovereign at Préobrajenskoïé, and a sort of casino. The furthest gardens of the *Sloboda* bordered on the village where Peter and his fortunes had grown up together. There was dancing in Lefort's house in the *Sloboda*,—there were displays of fireworks at Préobrajenskoïé. This was a new mania of the young Tsar's. He endeavoured, in later years, to justify the excess to which he carried this pastime (originated by Gordon, who had some knowledge of pyrotechny) by asserting the necessity of inuring his Russian subjects to the noise and smell of gunpowder. This, after Poltava, would appear somewhat superfluous; still Peter went on firing rockets, and composing set pieces, with the same eagerness as ever. The truth is, that from first to last he delighted in fireworks. To the end they were his favourite form of entertainment. He was no sportsman. Even as early as 1690 his predecessors' favourite hunting-box at Sokolniki was falling into ruin. Like his grandson, the unfortunate husband of the great Catherine, he loved noisy display, and he carried all things to extremes; the entertainment, to which a considerable part of his time was now devoted, involved considerable danger to himself and those about him, so incontinently did he set about the sport. Gordon's journal of February 26th, 1690, records the death of a gentleman, killed by the explosion of a rocket weighing five pounds. The same accident occurred on 27th January, in the following year.

These displays of fireworks alternated with the manœuvres of the *Potieshnyié*, also presided over by Gordon, and accompanied by serious risks. In a sham assault which took place on the 2nd of June 1691, Peter was burnt in the face by a grenade, and several officers close to him were seriously wounded. Shortly afterwards, Gordon himself was wounded in the leg. In October, 1691, Peter led a charge, waving his naked sword. Officers and soldiers, excited by the sight, fell on each other in real earnest, and Prince Ivan Dolgorouki was killed in the scuffle.¹

The roughness and violence of these warlike games were not in themselves absolutely unusual; the times were rough and violent. Charles XII., preparing for his career as a mighty warrior, outstripped his future adversary in this re-

¹ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 186.

spect. But there is a special and characteristic feature about the sham warfare in which Peter so delighted,—the touch of comic buffoonery it invariably betrays, which indicates a special tendency, destined to be considerably developed in the young man's mind. The fort on the banks of the Iaouza had grown into a little fortified town, with a regular garrison, a flotilla of boats, a Court of Justice, Administrative Offices, and a Metropolitan,—Zotof, a former tutor of the young Tsar's, whom he later created 'Pope' or 'Patriarch of the Fools.' It even had a King. This part was played by Romodanovski, who bore the title of King of Presburg, (the name now given to the town), and, in this quality, warred against the King of Poland, represented by Boutourlin. In 1694, the King of Poland was called upon to defend a duly fortified place against a besieging army led by Gordon. At the very first attack, without waiting for the effect, reckoned on beforehand, of the operations prescribed by science—lines of circumvallation, approaches, mines, and so forth—the garrison and its commander threw down their arms and took to flight. Peter was in a fury; the fugitives were ordered to return to the fort, and to fight to the bitter end. There was a tremendous expenditure of cannon fire, which, in spite of the blank cartridge, killed and wounded several people. Finally, the King of Poland was made prisoner, and led into the conqueror's camp with his hands tied behind his back.¹

It should not be forgotten, that at this period Russia was at peace, and even in actual alliance, with Poland, and that the real King of that friendly nation, whom all Europe acclaimed, was called John Sobieski! In a series of manœuvres, carried out in 1692, I see mention of cavalry drills, in which a squadron of *divarfs* took part. In 1694, the church choristers, enrolled in some new military body, were fighting, under the command of the court fool, Tourguénief, against the army clerks.

Peter was given up to his amusements. During this transition period, lasting nearly six years, the whole life of the future hero would seem to have been one perpetual merry-making, one orgy of noise and bustle, broken, indeed, by some useful and instructive exercises, but falling, for the most part, into puerility and licence of the worst kind. At

¹ Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs*, p. 39.

one moment he was learning to throw bombs, and climbing to the top of masts; the next he was singing in church, in a deep bass voice; then, straight from divine service, he would go and drink till the morrow, with his boon companions.

Von Kochen, a Swedish envoy, speaks of a yacht, entirely built, from stem to stern, by Karschten-Brandt's pupil; and another foreigner mentions a note from the Tsar, inviting himself to his house, and warning him that he means to spend the night drinking.¹ In the list of objects brought from Moscow to Préobrajenskoïé for the Sovereign's use, I see mortars, engineering tools, artillery ammunition, and parrots' cages. Within the fortress of Presburg, engineer officers, pyrotechnists, skilled artisans of every kind, elbowed the *douraks* (court fools), who killed soldiers for a joke, and escaped all punishment.²

Peter's military pastimes had, for some time, taken on a more serious or would-be serious form. In 1690, a regiment of Guards, the Préobrajenski, was raised, with a Courlander, George Von Mengden, as colonel. This was soon followed by the Siémionovski regiment,—one-third of the effective strength, in both cases, consisting of French Protestants.³ But the approaching campaign of Azof was to teach the young Tsar the real value of these apparently warlike troops, and the danger of not approaching serious matters seriously.

Peter gave himself a world of pains to build a fleet on the lake at Péréaslavl—the Pletchéiévo-Oziero, but this work was not his only occupation there. It is a pretty spot, reached from Moscow by a pleasant road running through a succession of valleys, and over woody hills. The clear waters of the Viksa, pouring out of the western end of the lake, pass through the neighbouring lake of Somino, and fall into the Volga. Westward, the gilded cupolas of the twenty churches of the town of Péréaslavl-Zaleski rise round the great Cathedral of the Transfiguration. Here Peter had built himself a one-storied wooden house,—the windows glazed with mica,—a double-headed eagle with a

¹ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 360.

² *Russian Archives*, 1875, vol. iii. p. 221.

³ Details as to the original constitution of these regiments, which were to play such an important part in the national history, will be found in the *Saint Petersburg Journal*, April 1778.

gilded wooden crown, set over the entrance door, was the sole adornment of the humble dwelling; but life went cheerily within those walls. The shipyard was but a few steps distant, but it is hardly likely that Peter worked in it during his frequent midwinter visits to the shores of his 'little sea.' There was the greatest difficulty, in February 1692, in inducing him to leave it, to receive the envoy of the Shah of Persia in audience.¹ The fact was, doubtless, that in that retired spot, far from the maternal eye, and from other less kindly curiosity, he felt himself more free to indulge in other pastimes. These were shared with numerous companions, frequently summoned from Moscow. Their carriages often rolled past caravans, laden with hogsheads of wine, and beer, and hydromel, and kegs of brandy. There were ladies, too, amongst the visitors. In the spring, when the lake was open, shipbuilding and drill began again, but none of it was very serious. A year before the campaign of Azof, Peter has not made up his mind where, on what sea, and against what enemies, he will utilise his future war-fleet! But he has already decided that Lefort, who has never been a sailor, shall be his Admiral; that the vessel on which he will hoist his flag shall be called the *Elephant*; that the ship will be full of gilding, have an excellent Dutch crew, and a no less excellent captain—Peter himself!²

The young Tsar's last journey to Péréaslavl took place in May 1693. He was not to look upon his lake and his shipyard again for twenty years—till 1722, when he was on the road to Persia. The fresh-water flotilla, which had cost him so much pains, given him so much delight, and never served any useful purpose, was lying in utter decay,—hulls, masts, and rigging, all rotten and useless. He fell into a fury;—these were sacred relics, and he gave the strictest orders for their preservation. All in vain. In 1803 but one boat remained, lying in a pavilion, itself fallen into ruin. There was not a sign of the house in which Peter had lived; everything, even to the birch trees, under the shade of which the carpenter's apprentice once rested from his toil, had utterly disappeared.³

¹ Gordon's *Journal*, Feb. 16, 1692.

² Posselt, *Der General und Admiral Franz Lefort* (Frankfort, 1866), vol. ii. pp. 313-315.

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 146.

In 1693 he felt himself cramped on the Pletchéiévo-Oziero, just as he had felt himself cramped, once before, on the ponds at Préobrajenskoïé. He extracted his mother's long-refused consent, and started for Archangel. He was to see the real sea at last. He had been obliged to promise not to go on board any ship—he was only to look at them without leaving the shore. These vows, as may be imagined, were soon forgotten. He nearly drowned himself, going out on a miserable yacht, to meet a ship he had caused to be bought in Amsterdam. She was a warship, but she brought other things besides guns—rich furniture, French wines, apes, and Italian dogs. When Peter set his foot on board, he was transported with delight. 'Thou shalt command her,' he wrote to Lefort, 'and I will serve as common sailor.' And to Burgomaster Witsen, who had purchased the ship for him: 'MIN HER, all I can write you at this present moment is that John Flamm (the Pilot) is safely arrived, bringing forty-four guns, and forty sailors. Greet all our friends. I will write thee more fully by the ordinary, for in this happy hour I do not feel inclined to write, but much rather to do honour to Bacchus, who, with his vine-leaves, is pleased to close the eyes of one who would otherwise send you a more detailed letter.'¹ This is signed—

‘*Schiper Fon schi*
‘*p santus profet*
‘*ities.*’

which is intended to mean ‘Captain of the *St. Prophet*.’ Peter, though already one-and-twenty, still treated orthography as a schoolboy joke, and, for the moment, he treated naval matters after much the same fashion—playing at being a sailor, as he had already played at being a soldier, or a civilised man. In Lefort’s house in the *Sloboda*, he dressed after the French fashion. He walked the streets of Archangel, in the garb of a Dutch sea-captain. Holland was his passion; he adopted the Dutch flag,—red, white, and blue—merely changing the order of the colours, and he was to be seen sitting in the wine-shops, emptying bottle after bottle, with the compatriots of Van Tromp and Van Ruyter.

In January, 1694, he was back in Moscow, beside the dying bed of his mother, Nathalia. When the end came he showed great grief, weeping freely. But three days after—

¹ *Letters and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 23.

wards he was back, merrymaking with Lefort. Was he then heartless, incapable of tender feeling? Not altogether; he showed nothing but kindness to Ivan, and, till the very end of that unhappy Sovereign's life, which occurred in 1696, he treated him with fraternal affection. Catherine was one day to find him something better than a passionate lover—a friend, and, later on, a husband, not absolutely without reproach indeed, but trusty, devoted, and deeply attached, if not over-refined nor impeccably faithful. At the time of his mother's death he was very young; and he was, and always remained, impatient of all constraint. His recovery from the loss of a parent, who had been a certain restraint on his actions, was as rapid and complete as his utter obliviousness of the actual existence of his wife.

On the 1st of May, he started once more for Archangel, and recommenced his whimsical sailing existence. He made promotions in his fleet, just as he had previously made them in his army. Romodanovski, Boutourlin, and Gordon, became respectively, Admiral, Vice-Admiral, and Rear-Admiral, without ever, the two first at least, having seen the sea, or set foot on the deck of any vessel. Peter himself remained a mere captain, just as he had remained a private of bombardiers in his own land forces. Determined efforts have been made to find some deep intention behind this deliberate appearance of modesty and self-effacement, which, in later years, was perpetuated, and developed into a system. I really believe that the dates, the circumstances, the very origin and earliest manifestations of this phenomenon, stamp it as a mere freak of fancy, which, like all freaks of that nature, have their logical explanation in some characteristic quality. It is the constitutional timidity of the man, masked, transfigured, idealised by the contradictory external appearances of a strong, self-willed, extravagant nature, and by the deceptive brilliance of his marvellous career, which is thus betrayed. There is nothing very deep, nor very serious, in all that constituted the existence of the future great man at the time of which I write. But all these pleasures and studies, the new fancy for foreign company,—the casino in the *Sloboda*,—the Préobrajenskoïé camp, and the Archangel wine-shops,—Lefort, Gordon, and the Dutch sailors,—all these, I say, had the effect of throwing him violently, and completely, out of the rut in which his

ancestors had run,—out of the *past*, into a road of which the end was not yet evident, but which already gave promise of leading him towards a future, stuffed with surprises.

II

And how was Russia faring, while her appointed lord rushed hither and thither, according to his capricious and vagabond fancy? Russia, so far as she was capable of understanding and reasoning over what befell her, was beginning to think she had gained but little by the *coup d'état* of 1689. The young Sovereign's friendships among the *Niemtsy*, and his constant visits to the *Sloboda*, had caused his subjects little displeasure or alarm. Alexis had accustomed them to such practices. But the late Tsar's western tastes, though less pronounced than Peter's, had been far more attractive in their results—industrial successes, legislative reforms, real progress, bearing evident fruit. The sole apparent harvest of Peter's firework displays, and military games, amounted to several dead men, and numerous maimed cripples. Besides, though the young Tsar carried his European amusements to an extreme point, the Boyards who governed in his name were, in all serious matters, rather disposed to be retrograde. Added to which, they governed very ill. Galitzin's expedition against the Tartars had been a failure. But at all events he had been beaten far from the frontiers of his own country, on the plains of Perekop. Now these same Tartars threatened the very borders of Holy Russia! Alarming news, calls for assistance, reports of defeat, came pouring in from every side. Mazeppa was threatened in the Ukraine. Dositheus, patriarch of Constantinople, wrote letters filled with gloomy rumours. A French envoy, he averred, had met the Han of the Crimea, and the Grand Vizier, at Adrianople. He had bestowed 10,000 ducats on the first, 70,000 on the second, on their promise that the Holy Places should be placed under French protection. The bargain had already been partly carried out. Catholic priests had taken the Holy Tomb, half Golgotha, the church at Bethlehem, and the Holy Grotto, out of the hands of the orthodox monks. They had destroyed the icons, and the Russian name had become a

scorn in the eyes of the Sultan, and his subjects. The Sultan had omitted the two Tsars of Russia from his written announcement of his succession, to all the other European rulers. News came from Vienna, where the Russian envoys had bought over the Foreign Office translator, Adam Stille, that the Emperor's ministers, and the Polish and the Turkish envoys, were in perpetual conference, to the utter exclusion of Russia. That country was completely put aside, and ran serious risk of being left alone to face the Tartar and the Turk.

Public uneasiness and discontent, thus justified, grew louder day by day. Peter, meanwhile, had wearied of his toys. Archangel roads, and the White Sea, frozen for seven months out of twelve, were but a poor resource. He had thought of seeking a passage through the Northern Ocean, which might open the road to China and the Indies. But the lack of means for such an expedition was all too evident. On the Baltic, nothing was possible. The Swedes were there already, and did not seem likely to be easily dislodged. Lefort put forward another plan, and now it is, especially at this slippery corner in the young hero's life, that the Genevan adventurer's influence brings forth really important consequences. His position, for some years past has been pre-eminent. He is the first figure in the series,—carried on in the persons of Ostermann, Bühren, Münich,—of great *parvenus* of foreign origin, who, for more than a century, were to sway the destinies of Russia. Two sentries mounted guard before his palace. The greatest lords in the country waited in his antechamber. Peter treated him, on every occasion, with a consideration hardly usual from a sovereign to a subject. He even publicly and soundly boxed the ears of his own brother-in-law, Abraham Féodorovitch Lapouhin, who fell out with the favourite, and damaged his wig.¹ During his absences, he wrote him letters, which breathed an exaggerated tenderness. He received, in return, missives revealing more unceremonious familiarity than affection.²

In 1695, the Genevan began to reflect on the satisfaction he might find in showing off his prodigious good fortune

¹ Pylaief, *Old Moscow* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 491.

² Peter the Great's *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 754. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. pp. 553-611.

before his Swiss and Dutch friends. Peter had already sent certain of his young comrades abroad. Why not follow them in person, to see, and study at first-hand, the wonders of which Timmermann and Karschten-Brandt had only given him a partial and mutilated idea? What delight for his eyes! What diversion in his budding boredom! What instructive sights! And what new pleasures! But an objection crops up. What kind of figure would the Tsar of all the Russias cut in Europe? He could only bring an unknown name, darkened and humbled by recent and by former defeats, which he had made no personal effort to retrieve. This thought, doubtless, it was, which forced Peter to reflect on his own life, on the sports and occupations which had hitherto absorbed all his activity, and to recognise their complete futility. A light flashed across his brain. Before presenting himself to the men of the western world, such great men, in his estimation,—should he not raise himself to their level, carry them something more than a record of schoolboy prowess? But how to set about it? At this point the young Tsar's fervid imagination fell in with the mental distress of the Boyards, to whom he had hitherto left the cares of state. They, too, felt the urgency of doing something to help themselves out of the unpleasant quandary, internal and external, into which the carelessness and awkwardness of a hand-to-mouth policy had led them. The impulse of these varied motives led up, at this particular moment, to the first attempt on Azof.

The intuitive genius of the future conqueror of Poltava, to whom, with many praises, the plan of campaign elaborated on this occasion has been ascribed, had, I believe, nothing to say to it. There was no necessity, indeed, for his taking that trouble. The plan, a traditional and classic one in the history of Russia's relations with her redoubtable southern neighbours, had been prepared long beforehand. Bathory, the great warrior borrowed by Poland from Transylvania, proposed it to Tsar Ivan in 1579.¹ The town of Azof, standing some ten miles from the Don,—called Tanais before the Christian era, the Tana of the middle ages,—a Genoese trading factory, captured and fortified by the Turks in 1475, had long been the natural point of attack and defence, for the two nations who had stood face to face, in perpetual quarrel,

¹ P. Pierling, *Popes et Tsars* (Paris, 1890), p. 204.

for centuries. It was the key of the river-mouth on one hand, the key of the Black Sea on the other; but the chief effort of the Muscovite army was not to be turned in this direction. The Boyards, with the greater part of the available Russian forces,—with all the old army, that which had followed Galitzin in his disastrous undertakings against the Tartars,—were simply to follow in his steps, and fight his campaign over again, with much the same results. The attempt on Azof was a mere accessory, an isolated *coup de main*, wherein the young Tsar's originating power was to find its scope. The leaders of the huge camp, moving slowly down to the Crimea, were heartily glad to be rid of him. They let him work his own sweet will. Nor did he himself give much pains to his preparations. The undertaking, in his eyes (as one of his letters written at the outset of the expedition clearly proves), was a mere continuation of the big manœuvres round Presburg.¹ He reckoned on taking the town by surprise; yet he refrained from confiding his 'pleasure' regiments to the improvised leaders he had given them during his sham battles on the banks of the Iaouza. These fights seem to have convinced him that the troops thus employed had developed into a real and serious military force, fit to face a great war; but he also felt, apparently, that his present adventure, being very different in its nature, called for different precautions. The 'Kings' of 'Poland' and of 'Presburg' were accordingly dismissed; yet, faithful to a habit long since abandoned in western warfare, he determined to divide the supreme command. Three Generals-in-chief—Golovin, Gordon, and Lefort²—rode at the head of his army, which numbered all his newly raised regiments, those of the Guard, Lefort's, and some detachments of troops drawn from the court and from the cities, *Streltsy* and *Tsaredvortsy*, thirty-one thousand men in all. The expedition thus organised still bears a close resemblance to a pleasure party. The Generals, one of whom at least, Lefort, has not a notion of what real war means, wrangle from the outset. The young Tsar cracks jokes, carries on his favourite games of masquerade and rough buffoonery, interferes in all directions, gives contra-

¹ Letter to Apraxin, April 16, 1695. *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 28.

² Petrof, *The Armed Forces of Russia* (Moscow, 1892. Published under the auspices of the Ministry for War), vol. ii. p. 4.

dictory orders, assumes the pseudonym of Peter Alexiéf and the rank of captain, so as to parade at the head of his bombardier company. Though he has stripped Romodanovski of his prerogatives, he has left him his title, and in the middle of the campaign he writes:—

‘MIN HER KENICH,—Your Majesty’s letter, dated from your capital of Presburg, has been duly delivered to me. Your Majesty’s condescension binds me, in return, to be ready to shed every drop of my blood, with which object I am just about to march,
BOMBARDIER PETER.’¹

The end is what we might have expected. Peter, like Sophia and Galitzin, is reduced to misleading opinion by reports of imaginary triumphs. Te Deums are sung at Moscow for the capture of a couple of insignificant forts. But all the world knows that the attack on the fortress of Azof has failed, twice over, with great loss and slaughter. The new army and its young founder have been tried, and found wanting. Seven years of youthful extemporisation, on the value of which judgment has been deferred, have ended in piteous and humiliating failure.

Here the history of Peter the Great begins.

III

Peter was not a great man only—he was the most complete, the most comprehensive, and the most diversified personification of a great people that has ever appeared. Never, I should think, have the collective qualities of a nation, good and bad, the heights and the depths of its scale of morality, every feature of its physiognomy, been so summed up in a single personality, destined to be its historic type. Those same unsuspected powers of mind and soul, which drove Peter into sudden action, and raised him to greatness, were the very qualities which Russia has displayed from day to day, from year to year, these two centuries past, and which will make her greatness, as they made his. Beaten by the Turks, beaten by the Swedes, overrun by Europeans, as she had once been by Asiatics, after twenty defeats, twenty treaties of peace, forced on her by her conquerors, she was still to enlarge her frontiers at their expense, to dismember Turkey, Sweden, and Poland, to end by dictating

¹ May 19, 1695. *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 29.

laws to the Continent of Europe. And all this because she persevered.

Perseverance, obstinate determination to reach the goal, even when that seemed utterly impossible,—never to swerve from the path once chosen, however dangerous, never to change adopted measures, though they be defective, simply to double and treble effort, panting, like some wearied wood-cutter, to multiply blows and await their result, resolutely, patiently, stoically,—this is the secret hidden in the Russian soul, tempered to adamant hardness by centuries of slavery and centuries of redeeming toil. The greatness of Peter, the greatness of Russia, are the outcome of the Mongol conquest, and of the patient genius of the Moscow *Kniaz*, hardened on the anvil which wore out their conqueror's hammers.

The Moscow grumblers had fine sport on the morrow of that first disastrous campaign, recalling the Patriarch Joachim's prophetic words and the anathemas he launched against the foreign soldiery, commanded by heretic generals. Nevertheless, Peter increased his calls on foreign science and industry. He sent to Austria and to Prussia for engineers, to Holland and to England for sailors and for shipwrights. The flotilla on the lake of Péréiaslavl had been utterly useless. He set about building another, at Voronèje, in the valley of the Don. He met with enormous, well-nigh insuperable, difficulties. The artisans engaged abroad first tarried in their coming, and then, when they saw the country and the proffered task, took to their heels. The native workmen, not understanding what was required of them, spoilt the work, and being punished, deserted, too, *en masse*. The forests where the timbers were cut caught fire, and hundreds of square leagues were burnt. The higher order of workers, officers, engineers, and doctors, imitated and exaggerated the freaks of conduct of which their master still set the example. There were scenes of orgy, quarrels, bloody scuffles. General and Lord High Admiral Lefort, being summoned by courier to render an account of certain details, connected with the administration of his Department, thus opens his report:—'To-day Prince Boris Alexiévitch (Galitzin) is coming to dine with me, and we shall drink your health. I fear you have no good beer at Voronèje; I will bring you some, and some Muscat wine as well.'¹ No

¹ Solovief, vol. xix. p. 227. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. p. 585, etc.

matter! The work had been begun in the autumn of 1696. On the 3rd of the following May, three-and-twenty galleys and four fireships were launched, and dropped down the river Don, on the way to the sea. At their head Captain Peter Alexiéfief on the galley *Principium*, built, in great part, by his own hands, did duty as pilot. Lord High Admiral Lefort, Vice-Admiral Lima, a Venetian, and Rear-Admiral Balthasar de L'Osière, a Frenchman, followed on board the other vessels. This time the Russian fleet was created in good earnest.

I must at once acknowledge that it was not a very brilliant fleet, nor did the land army, commanded by its new Generalissimo, the Boyard Shein, with which it was to co-operate in a new attempt on Azof, cover itself with laurels. The 'pleasure' regiments had fallen too much into the habit of joking. As for the *Streltsy*, they had grown fit for nothing but besieging palaces; one cannon shot threw them into wild rout. Peter, as he watched them, must have meditated, even under the walls of the impregnable fortress, on the fate to which he destined them, in the near future. The appearance and behaviour of this camp, previous to the tardy arrival of the military men promised by the Emperor, call up memories of the siege of Troy. The Generals lost their heads, and Gordon, the most capable of them ail, having vainly tried to open a breach in the wall, the whole body of troops, officers and men, were called into council, and invited to give their opinion as to the operations to be undertaken. A *Strelets* suggested that a mound of earth should be raised against the enemy's ramparts, so as first to overlook and then to bury them. Vladimir the Great had, it appeared, adopted this expedient to reduce Kherson.¹ This strategy was adopted with enthusiasm, with the sole result of causing the Turks some little alarm, and drawing smiles from the German engineers when they reached their destination, at last. Peter's own high spirits, cheerfulness, and boyish boldness were delightful. He writes jokingly to his sister Nathalia, who is alarmed at the dangers to which she fancies she is exposed; 'It is not I who run after the bullets, they run after me. Will you not tell them to stop?' But steady as he was, even then, in his long prepared resolutions, he was specially subject to fits of dismay and momentary discouragement.

¹ Petrof, vol. ii. p. 6.

ment,—very easily disconcerted, in fact. On the 20th of May, attempting to reconnoitre the Turkish fleet, which he desired to prevent from entering the Don, and re-victualling the fortress, he fell into a sudden terror of its formidable appearance, and beat a precipitate retreat with all his galleys. At ten o'clock the next morning he was in Gordon's tent, gloomy, depressed, full of the worst forebodings. At three in the afternoon, he was back again, beaming with joy. The Cossacks, without receiving any orders, following the inspiration of their own courage, had flown across the water in their *tchaïki*, frail leather skiffs, fleet as the bird whose name they bear (*tchaïka*, seagull), had attacked the Sultan's huge vessels on the preceding night, and driven them into flight, with heavy loss.¹ Here was a fine opportunity for Gordon's artillery to distinguish itself! For, though, the guns never being properly trained, not a single shell fell within the town, a tremendous amount of powder was burnt in triumphal salvos. The arrival of a fresh detachment of troops, the taking of a redoubt, the capture of one of the enemy's skiffs, —everything was made a pretext for a cannonade.

But no matter! The effort, this time, is so tremendous, the determination to conquer so intense, that, with the help of Cossacks and German engineers, the thing is done at last. On the 16th of July the guns at last open an effective fire. On the 17th the *Zaporoztsi* (Dnieper Cossacks), who are as bold on land as on sea, carry part of the out-works of the fortress by a bold stroke, and on the 18th Peter writes to Romodanovski: 'Your Majesty will learn with joy that God has favoured your armies; your Majesty's prayers, and your good fortune, have brought the people of Azof to surrender yesterday.'

Now the young Tsar can dare to show himself to his western neighbours, and cruel experience has convinced him that he still has everything to learn from them. His mind appears broadened, and illuminated by a new brightness. He conceives a vast plan of naval policy, he foresees the share which the foreign element must have in its execution, and provides for it amply. He desires to unite the Don with the Volga by a network of canals, but he does not propose to go blindly about such an undertaking. It is not enough to engage constructors in Venice, in Holland,

¹ Gordon's *Journal*, May 10, 1696.

in Denmark, and in Sweden. It is not enough to send fifty officers of his household into foreign countries—twenty-eight to Italy, twenty-two to Holland and to England.¹ He must follow them, he must put himself to school, and in grim earnest this time, seriously, laboriously, in the sweat of his brow. There is something childish still, about this thirst for knowledge, and passion for work,—more than one sign of puerility will mark the studious pursuits of the future carpenter's apprentice at Saardam,—but the goal is marked out, the impulse has been given. The great journey, the grand tour of Europe, is to inaugurate one of the most wonderful careers in history.

¹ Solovief, vol. xix. p. 238.

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNEY—GERMANY—HOLLAND—ENGLAND—THE RETURN

- I. Precedents—The Tsar's incognito—First disguise—The great embassy—Peter Mihailof—Impression in Moscow and in Europe—Departure delayed—A conspiracy—Bloodstained ghosts—The woodcutter's hatchet and the axe of Ivan the Terrible—Sweden—Riga, a chilly reception—A future *casus belli*—In Germany—Koenigsberg—Curiosity and eccentricities—An artillery diploma—Koppenbrügge—Meeting with Charlotte Sophia of Prussia—Peter's first social appearances—Leibnitz.
- II. Holland—Zaandam—Legend and history—The house at Krimpenburg—A fair Dutchwoman—Amsterdam—Serious study begins—Shipwright and Sovereign—Weaknesses and oddities—The Russian Bacchus.
- III. England—An uncomfortable room—Peter at Kensington Palace—Unfavourable impressions—Burnet—More legends—London and Deptford—Toil and pleasure—Mrs. Cross, the actress—General initiation.
- IV. *En route* for Vienna—The arrival a failure—Austrian pride—Moral depression—The Emperor and the Tsar—The drawbacks of incognito—A diplomatic check—Failure of the journey to Venice—Alarming news from Russia—'The seed of the Miloslavski'—Hasty return—Interview with Augustus II. at Rawa—Close of the journey.

I

To find any precedent, in Russian history, for Peter's journey, we must go back to the eleventh century. In 1075 the Grand Duke of Kief, Izaslaf, paid a visit to the Emperor Henry IV. at Mayence. Thus once again, unconsciously, no doubt, Peter took up an old tradition. From the days of Ivan the Terrible, the mere desire, on the part of any subjects of the Tsar, to visit foreign countries had been held high treason. In Tsar Michael's reign, a certain Prince Hvorostinin was severely prosecuted on this very score. He had spoken, before some friends, of a journey to Poland and Rome, which he was much inclined to take, 'to find somebody to talk with.' Yet a little later, the son of Alexis'

favourite councillor, Ordin-Nashtchokin, having secretly crossed the frontier, there was some question of his being put to death abroad.¹

Peter himself did not venture to brave opinion to the extent of giving any official character to his departure. All he dared permit himself was a kind of half clandestine frolic, and there is a sort of naïve timidity about the precautions taken to ensure an incognito, which, with his constitutional petulance, he was to be the first to break. A great Embassy was organised, charged with a mission to request the Emperor, the Kings of England and of Denmark, the Pope, the Low Countries, the Elector of Brandenburg, and the Republic of Venice—the whole of Europe, in fact, save France and Spain—‘to renew the ancient bonds of friendship, so as to weaken the enemies of the Christian name.’ The ambassadors were three in number. Lefort, as ambassador-in-chief, took precedence of his colleagues, Golovin and Voznitsin. Their suite consisted of fifty-five gentlemen and ‘volunteers,’ amongst them a non-commissioned officer of the Préobrajenski regiment, who answered to the name of Peter Mihaïlof,—the Tsar himself. During the whole course of the journey, letters intended for the Sovereign were to bear the simple superscription, ‘To be given to Peter Mihaïlof.’ This was mere childishness,—but there is something touching about one detail. The seal to be used by the mock non-commissioned officer represented a young carpenter, surrounded by his shipwright’s tools, with this inscription: ‘My rank is that of a scholar, and I need masters.’²

At Moscow, opinion as to the real object of the journey was very different. The Tsar was generally believed to be going abroad to do much as he had done, hitherto, in the *Sloboda*, in other words, to amuse himself.³ Did Peter himself, at that moment, perceive the distant horizon towards which his steps were tending? It is very doubtful. He did indeed, as he travelled through Livonia, talk of trimming his subjects’ beards, and shortening their garments;⁴ but, judging from the faces and habiliments of his travelling companions, this may fairly be taken for an idle jest. Lefort was garbed

¹ Solovief, vol. ix. p. 461; vol. xi. p. 93.

² Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 18.

³ *Ibid.* p. 640.

⁴ Blomeberg, *An Account of Livonia* (London), p. 332 (French edition, 1705).

in the Tartar style, and the young Prince of Imeretia wore a splendid Persian costume.

The journey indeed, in its earlier days, was very far from possessing the importance, either from the Russian or from the European point of view, with which later events have invested it. It made, in fact, no sensation whatsoever. I regret to have to contradict, in this matter, another legend, very dear to the national vanity. Russians had already grown accustomed to see their Sovereign rushing hither and thither, or rather indeed to never seeing him at all; European eyes were turned in quite a different direction. The moment Peter had pitched on, to make acquaintance with his western friends, and rouse their curiosity, was a solemn one for them. The Congress of Ryswick was just about to meet. It absorbed the attention of the whole world, political, commercial, and intellectual. Of this I will offer one proof only,—any one who goes to the Quai d'Orsay, may there consult the eight volumes containing the correspondence of Louis XIV. with the plenipotentiaries who were engaged, in the course of the year 1697, in defending his interests before that great diplomatic gathering. I will undertake that Peter's name will be found to occur only once, and that once in a most casual manner. The Tsar had paused in his work and scientific pursuits at Amsterdam, and had travelled to the Hague, where his embassy was officially received. The plenipotentiaries mention this fact, and that is all. He and they had been near neighbours for many months, they residing at Delft, he studying at Amsterdam,—yet they do not even seem to have suspected his existence. It is very doubtful whether they knew his name. Even in connection with Polish affairs, which constantly occupied their attention, they never refer to it. They have no suspicion, evidently, of the part which the future ally of Augustus II. aspires henceforth to play.

The appearance of the Russian Sovereign beyond the frontiers of his little-known Empire attracted interest in a special circle only. In the following year, it was to furnish the teaching body of Thorn with the subject of a public disputation.¹ Learned men had already turned their attention to Muscovy. In England, Milton had written a book on the

¹ *Conjecturæ aliquot politicæ de susceptis magni Muscoviæ Ducis . . . itineribus* (Thorunii, 1698, St. Petersburg Library).

great Northern Empire, which had been followed by a whole literature devoted to the same subject. Leibnitz had recently expressed his opinion that the Muscovites were the only people capable of freeing Europe from the Turkish yoke. And it was with this learned world, especially, that Peter Mihailof desired to enter into relations. From this point of view, the brief interval of respite and relaxation which the exhaustion of France had granted Europe, between the great crisis which had placed Louis XIV. face to face with the most formidable of coalitions, and the approaching struggle of the Spanish Succession, was a most propitious moment for a tour, 'on business or on pleasure bent,' through the old European Continent.

The Tsar's departure, which had been fixed for the month of February 1697, was delayed by the discovery of a plot against his life. At the head of the conspirators we find an old acquaintance, Tsikler, Sophia's former henchman, who had joined Peter's party, but whom the Sovereign's scorn had turned into a malcontent. As for his accomplices, they are easily guessed,—the *Streltsy*, again and always the *Streltsy*! Was Peter doomed ever to find them in his path, breathing threats and hatred? This incident was quickly closed, a few heads were cut off, and at last, on the 10th of March, the start was made. But a shadow had fallen across the brightness of the journey, and the feeling of intense bitterness rose higher and higher in the young Sovereign's heart. Were these *Streltsy* to haunt him for ever? Were they never to cease recalling the bloodstained ghosts that had hovered round his cradle?

Well, war it should be, since they desired it! Their account should be settled on the first favourable opportunity. And he swore to be on his guard henceforth, to set steel against steel, unsleeping watchfulness against perpetual plotting, the scaffold waiting on the Red Square, against the dagger lurking ready in the shadow. The friends and the most faithful helpers of the Sovereign must see to it, till he returned to do the work himself. But even from afar, he would stir up Romodanovski's zeal. Wheresoever he went, in Germany, in Holland, and in England, through all the new and wonderful and dazzling sights he was to behold, his eyes were to carry with them the terrible vision, the anguished nightmare, of the mortal peril which seemed

bound up with his destiny. Thus does the distrustful, fierce, implacable genius of his ancestors revive and grow in him, wedding the splendour of his civilising work to the bloody shadows of a horrible carnage; woodcutter and executioner at once, he wields alike the hatchet and the axe.

The progress of the embassy was slow. There were 250 persons to transport. Lefort alone had ten gentlemen, seven pages, fifteen serving-men, two jewellers, six musicians, and four dwarfs in his train. At Riga, on Swedish ground, the reception was courteous, but cold. The Governor, Dahlberg, sent word that he was ill, and did not appear. Later on, Peter was to try to turn this fact into a *casus belli*, and talk of personal insult to himself. Officially speaking, his personality cannot have been in question. At Riga, as elsewhere, the ambassadors gave the word that the reported presence of the young Sovereign in their company was to be treated as an idle story. He was supposed to be at Voronèje, busy with his shipbuilding. There may have been a touch of malice about the literal manner in which Dahlberg accepted this assurance. And the Russians, following, in this respect, an inclination which, I am inclined to fear, has grown hereditary, demanded all the rights of hospitality after too familiar and exacting a fashion. Peter went so far as to endeavour to take plans of the fortress with his own hands. This attempt was instantly cut short. The Swedes can hardly be said to have done wrong, for Peter's father had besieged the place. The fault, at all events, if fault there was, was on both sides.

At Mittau, the travellers' ill-humour passed away. The reigning Duke, Frederick Casimir, was an old acquaintance of Lefort's. He gave the embassy a cordial and magnificent reception. Peter forgot his incognito, and surprised his entertainers by the unexpectedness of his remarks, and by his jokes on the habits, prejudices, and barbarous laws of his own country. The West was beginning to take hold of him, but he was still the same extravagant fantastic youth. At Libau, he beheld the Baltic, the Vargians' Sea, for the first time. Bad weather prevented his going farther, at that moment, and he spent his days in the *Weinkeller*, with the sailors of the port, drinking and joking, and insisting, this time, on passing himself off as a plain captain, who had been sent to arm a privateer for the

service of the Tsar. At last he reached Koenigsberg, having outstripped his embassy, which travelled by land, while he made a short cut by sea, on a merchant vessel. He refused to receive the greeting of the Prince of Holstein-Beck, sent by the Elector of Brandenburg to meet him, made the master of the vessel vow he had no distinguished passenger, remained on board till dusk, and did not make up his mind to accept the lodging prepared for him till ten o'clock at night. There he found the Sovereign's Master of the Ceremonies, Johann von Besser, an accomplished courtier, a learned man, and a poet into the bargain. He rushed at him, snatched off his wig, and threw it into a corner. 'Who is he?' he asked his own people. The functions of the personage in question were explained to him as far as possible. 'Very good, let him bring me a ——!' This anecdote, I must acknowledge, although vouched for by a serious and a far from ill-natured historian, has a suspicious air.¹ But the numberless analogous traits preserved by tradition, leave us in no doubt as to the reality of the general impression it produces. This much is clear, the reformer of the future was still a young savage. The next morning he paid a visit to the Elector, conversed in bad German, drank a great deal of Hungarian wine, but, having once more assumed the character of Peter Mihailof, refused to receive the Sovereign's return visit. Later on he changed his mind, and prepared what he considered a magnificent reception, capped with some fireworks of his own composition. At the very last moment the Elector begged to be excused. A sorry business, this, for the bearers of the unpleasant tidings, Count von Kreyzen and Provost von Schlacken: Peter was at table with Lefort and one of his dwarfs; Lefort sat pipe in mouth, the Tsar, half drunk, and full of tenderness for his favourite, leaning across, from time to time, to kiss him. He invited the messengers to seat themselves beside him. Then suddenly, striking the table furiously with his fist, he cried: 'The Elector is a good man, but his counsellors are devils! *Gehe! gehe!* (be off with you!)', and rising, he seized one of the Brandenburgers by the throat, and dragged him towards the door, still shouting, '*Gehe! Gehe!*'

¹ Bergman, *Peter der Grosse als Mensch und Regent* (Riga, 1823), vol. i. p. 256 (Russian edition, vol. i. p. 223, note).

When he went out to walk the streets of Koenigsberg, as a simple tourist, every one took to their heels, to avoid meeting him, for he had a fertile fancy for jokes of a far from agreeable order. Meeting a lady of the court one day, he stopped her with a sudden gesture, shouting 'Halt!' in a voice of thunder. Then taking hold of the watch, which hung at her waist, he looked at the hour and departed.¹

The Elector, notwithstanding, continued to show his guest a friendly face, and give him a hospitable welcome. His love of show and ceremonial was flattered by the presence of this extraordinary embassy, and he looked forward to the conclusion of a defensive alliance against Sweden. Thus he spent 150,000 crowns—it was wasted money. Peter slipped through his fingers, his mind distracted, taken up with other things. His attention, or rather that of his counsellors, was absorbed by political matters, and by Polish affairs. The death of Sobieski had been followed by the rival candidatures of the Elector of Saxony and the Prince de Conti. Peter sided with Augustus,—in other words, against France, the ally of the Turk. Writing from Koenigsberg to the Polish lords, he formally announced his intention of interfering in the struggle. Prince Romodanovski should lead an army upon the frontiers of Lithuania. He had got to threats already.

The embassy dallied at Koenigsberg, waiting on events. Peter seized the opportunity of satisfying his curiosity, his impatience to acquire knowledge—both of them as keen as ever. Certain of these curiosities of his were more than singular, as when he insisted on seeing a criminal broken on the wheel, which instrument of torture he apparently dreamt of introducing, as a matter of variety, into the criminal procedure of his own country. The authorities demurred, on the score of the non-existence of any criminal deserving such a punishment. The Tsar was astounded. 'What, all that fuss about killing a man! Why not take one of the servants of his own suite?'² He was working daily with the Master of Artillery, Sternfeldt, and after a few weeks, was the recipient of a regular diploma, which should not be too seriously taken. Three years later, Peter was with the King

¹ Posselt, vol. ii. pp. 407, 600, 601; Theiner, *Historical Monuments* (Rome, 1859), p. 369; Herrmann, *Geschichte Russlands*, vol. iv. p. 67.

² Pöllnitz (Baron Charles Louis), *Memoirs* (Berlin, 1791), vol. i. p. 179.

of Poland, at the Castle of Birzé, in Lithuania. The two Sovereigns, both of them given to eccentricities, amused themselves by firing heavy cannon at a mark. Augustus made two hits, Peter never touched the target once.¹

The young Tsar was already the strange creature with whom the European world was destined, later, to make acquaintance, and at whom it was long to marvel and to tremble. Active beyond all description, turbulent, prying, cheerful, as a rule, full of jokes and high spirits, good-natured too, with sudden shifts of temper, fits of gloomy depression, or violence, or melancholy, genial but wayward, restless and disturbing. One night, as he sat at supper with the Elector, in a low room floored with marble, one of the servants dropped a plate. In a moment Peter had bounded to his feet, with haggard eyes and features working; he drew his sword, and thrust in all directions, fortunately without wounding any one. When he calmed down, he imperiously demanded that punishment should be inflicted on the guilty serving-man. The difficulty was got over by having some poor devil, already sentenced for a different peccadillo, whipped before his eyes.²

Early in July, Augustus seeming to be definitely taking the upper hand in Poland, the embassy started forth afresh. Vienna was the point on which the journey was to have been first directed, in the hope of negotiating a treaty of alliance. But the Tsar's envoy, Nefimof, desired, in appearance at all events, to forestall its efforts. According to his report, the alliance, offensive and defensive, was already concluded. Lefort, on the other hand, urged a direct move to Holland, though his somewhat tepid Calvinistic zeal weighed less in the matter than has been frequently supposed. Chance had far more to do than has generally been imagined with the direction of this journey, and even with the general appearance finally impressed on it by circumstances.

It is strange that Peter did not pause at Berlin on his way to Holland—he merely passed rapidly across the town. The future capital of Frederick the Great appeared to him but a barren field for the gratification of his curiosity. He had the good fortune to behold, elsewhere, the most attractive thing in all Prussia, and thus to make acquaintance with one

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 90.

² Pöllnitz, *Memoirs*. Pöllnitz is not altogether a reliable witness.

of the fairest fruits of German civilisation and culture. The Electress of Brandenburg, the future Queen Sophia of Prussia, had not accompanied her husband to Koenigsberg. She had taken advantage of his absence, to pay a visit to her mother, the Electress Sophia of Hanover. But the arrival of the ruler,—still a more or less fabulous monarch,—of mysterious Muscovy, had not failed to arouse her interest. Mother and daughter were numbered amongst the most well-educated women of their day. Sophia Charlotte, at one time the destined bride of the Duc de Bourgogne, grandson of Louis XIV., had spent two years at the court of Versailles. Her French associations had clung to her. At the age of barely nine-and-twenty, she had the reputation of being the prettiest and the most witty woman in her country. Her intimate circle was eminently intellectual. Leibnitz, who was one of its members, had inspired it with the very lively interest with which the event, which had so excited the town of Koenigsberg, had personally filled him, opening, as it did, before his versatile mind whole new horizons, a fresh programme of study, ethnographical, linguistic, and archæological, a huge scheme of great scientific enterprises, in the execution of which, the part of the great German savant, aided by the Russian Sovereign, seemed clearly indicated. He had already set himself to learn the history and the language of the country. Long years before, he had called Poland the natural rampart of Christianity against barbarians of every kind, whether Muscovite or Turk. All this was forgotten. Peter might indeed be a barbarian, but he was a barbarian with a great future before him, and Leibnitz rejoiced over him, ranking him with Kam-Ki-Amalogdo-Khan, the Sovereign of China, and Yasok-Adjan-Nugbad, the King of Abyssinia, his contemporaries, who likewise seemed to be meditating mighty undertakings.¹ Sophia Charlotte had caused circumstantial reports concerning the Tsar's stay at Koenigsberg to be sent her. These, while giving her no very high idea of the degree of culture and education she might expect to find in the august traveller, had not diminished her desire of seeing him. She kept up an active correspondence on this subject with the state minister, Fuchs. In May 1697, she wrote: 'I would have him persuaded to come here, not to see, but to be seen,

¹ Guerrier, *Leibnitz in seinen Beziehungen zu Russland*, pp. 8-20.

and we would willingly keep the money generally spent on rare animals for use on this occasion.' And a month later, 'Though I am a great enemy of dirt, my curiosity, this time, is too strong for me.'¹

Peter, interested in his turn, urged, doubtless, by his pleasant memories of the fair ladies in the *Sloboda*, willingly agreed to a meeting, to take place at Koppenbrügge, in the Grand Duchy of Zell, a fief of the House of Brandenburg, belonging to the Prince of Nassau. At first the young Sovereign took fright at the number of people he noticed in the place,—the two Electresses having neglected to warn him they were bringing their whole family with them. He tried to steal away, hastily left the village, and more than an hour was spent in parleying before he could be induced to return. At last he made his appearance at the castle, but his only reply to the compliments addressed to him by the two Princesses, was to cover his face with his hands, repeating the words, 'Ich kann nicht sprechen.'² Shyness this, if you will, but constitutional timidity as well. I hold to this opinion, and see a confirmation of it in the continuation of the interview. For the young Sovereign soon recovers from his agitation, and is, indeed, very quickly tamed. At supper he shows signs of awkwardness, and is guilty of some boorishness. He is puzzled with his napkin, which he does not know how to use, and eats in dirty and slovenly fashion. He forces the whole company to remain at table for four hours, drinking endless toasts to his health, and standing each time. But in spite of all, the impression he produces is not a bad one. He seems simple, with a great deal of natural wit, answers questions readily and promptly, and, once started, carries on the longest conversation without any difficulty. Asked if he cares for hunting, he answers by showing his hands, hardened by toil. He has no time for hunting. After supper, he agrees to dance, on condition that the two Princesses set the example. He desires to put on gloves, but finds he has none. The gentlemen of his suite take the whalebone stays of their partners for a natural physical feature, and loudly remark that 'the German ladies' backs are devilish hard.' The Tsar sends for one of

¹ Varnhagen von Ense, *Leben der Königin von Preussen, Sophie Charlotte* (Berlin, 1837), pp. 74, 76.

² 'I do not know how to talk!'

his jesters, and as the silly buffoonery of that individual does not seem to please the ladies' taste, he seizes a huge broom and sweeps him outside. But here again, take him all in all, his attractiveness seems to have been stronger than the astonishment he aroused. He was a lovable savage at all events, and, better still, 'He is' (so writes the Electress's mother) 'an altogether extraordinary man—it is impossible to describe him or even to imagine what he is, without having seen him.' Neither the mother nor the daughter had found those four hours at supper a moment too long. Both of them would have willingly stayed longer yet, 'without feeling an instant's weariness.' The younger Electress closes her letter, recounting her impressions, to Fuchs with this unfinished but very suggestive sentence: 'I have said enough to weary you, but I cannot do otherwise. I find pleasure in speaking of the Tsar, and if I had only myself to consider, I would tell you that . . . I shall always have real pleasure in being of service to you.'¹

Leibnitz was not, unfortunately, present at this meeting. He had reckoned on the passage of the embassy through Minden, and had hastily sketched out a plan of work and of reforms to be presented to the Tsar. He only succeeded in gaining admittance to one of Lefort's nephews, who dismissed him civilly. Peter remained utterly inaccessible. Learned men who knew nothing of shipbuilding, and had no knowledge of the preparation of fireworks, possessed, as yet, no interest for him. He panted to see the country of Karschten-Brandt and Kort. At Schenkenschen, a Dutch frontier town, on the road to Amsterdam, a woman asked the travellers whether they were Christians. There was a rumour that the Muscovites were on their way to Cleves, to receive Holy Baptism!

II

Saardam or Zaandam, and the shipwright-Tsar's cottage in that charming little Low-Country village, to which so many pilgrimages are now made, never knew fame till towards the middle of the eighteenth century. Baron Pöllnitz, who devotes five pages of his memoirs, written in 1726, to a

¹ Ermann, *Memoirs bearing on the History of Sophia Charlotte* (Berlin, 1861), pp. 116-120. The details of the interview are taken from the *Correspondence of the two Princesses with Fuchs*.

description of this out-of-the-way corner, makes no mention of the illustrious guest to whom it has owed its later glory. The celebrated writer, Wagenaer, does not refer to Zaandam, in his account of Peter's visit to Holland.¹ A curious example this, of the fashion in which popular imagination will add its own marginal notes to a given page of history. Historically speaking, we may be quite sure, the greater part of the time-honoured details of Peter's residence in the neighbourhood of Amsterdam, have no foundation in fact. It is not even absolutely certain that he ever occupied the cottage now so piously preserved. According to Scheltema, who quotes Noomen's diary, as yet unpublished, the dwelling belonged to a blacksmith of the name of Guerrit Kist. The records of the Lutheran community of the place speak of a different proprietor—Boij Thijsen. All the workmen's houses lining the little canal which falls into the Y so absolutely resemble each other, that some confusion may very well have arisen. Voltaire and his disciples have indeed followed the life of the heroic apprentice step by step, and hour by hour, down the whole course of his legendary freak; they see him making his bed in his humble cottage, cooking his food, constructing first a model ship, and then a model windmill, each of them four feet long, with his own hands. He fits a mast into his sailing boat, spends long days in the ship-building yards, wielding the hatchet or the plane, and in spite of all these multitudinous occupations he visits saw-mills, spinning-mills, rope-walks, compass-makers' and locksmiths' workshops. Going into a paper-mill, he lays hands on the apparatus for drawing the sheets, and performs this delicate task with the most perfect success. How long must it have taken him to do all these things? Almost two years, Voltaire assures us.

The Tsar spent *one week* in the village of Saardam.²

What brought him there? Chance, to a certain extent, and, to a very great one, that ignorant simplicity which was his constant companion throughout his first European tour. Zaandam was, at that time, a fairly important shipbuilding

¹ Wagenaer, *History of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1750), p. 721. See also *Vaderlandsche Historie* (Amsterdam, 1757), vol. xvi. pp. 377-379.

² Voltaire has somewhat contradicted himself on this point. Compare his *Works*, 1853 edition, vol. iv. pp. 576 and 663.

centre, numbering some fifty ship-yards, but, whether as regards the importance or the perfection of the work turned out, none of these establishments could bear any comparison with the shipbuilding yards at Amsterdam. Peter, leaving the majority of his travelling companions at Koppenbrügge, and accompanied by some dozen of his 'volunteers,' passed through the Capital without a halt, and hurried straight to the little village. Wherefore? because the best workmen amongst the Dutch carpenters, none of them, of course, first-rate, whom he had employed at Prébrajenskoïé, at Périaslavl and at Voronèje had chanced to be natives of Zaandam. Whence he had concluded, that to see fine ships, and learn how to make them, it behoved him to go there, and not elsewhere.

He established himself in the village inn. Faithful to his mania for dressing-up, he forthwith sent for suits like those worn by the local boatmen—red waistcoats with large buttons, short jackets, and wide breeches. Thus garbed, he and his followers wandered through the streets, visiting the work-yards, even entering the workmen's houses, to the huge astonishment of their denizens. These houses bore a strong resemblance to those Peter had been accustomed to inhabit in his own country. He found one that took his fancy, and settled down in it. He bought a *boicjer* or small sailing-boat, fitted it with a stepped mast, then a new invention, and spent his time sailing his little vessel on the Gulf. At the end of a week he had had enough of it. The ships he had seen on the waters of the Y, or in the shipbuilding yards, were mere merchant vessels, of moderate tonnage. His presence had flurried the quiet population of the place, causing trouble to the local authorities, and some inconvenience to himself. Nobody, it is quite clear, was deceived by his disguise. His arrival had been foretold, and a description of his person given to one of the local workmen by a relation employed in Russia; 'Tall, with a head that shakes, a right arm that is never quiet, and a wart on his face.' Some children, whom he had treated roughly, threw stones at him. He lost his temper, forthwith forgot his incognito, and loudly proclaimed his quality. He was given a hint that his departure would be hailed with satisfaction, and his Embassy having arrived at Amsterdam, he determined to rejoin it.

One week he spent at Zaandam,—sailing about in a boat, and making love to a servant-girl at the inn, to whom he presented fifty ducats.¹ But his strange behaviour and his carnival disguise had made their impression. He had sowed the seeds, in that out-of-the-way spot, of a crop of picturesque anecdotes, out of which the legend was to grow. Before the end of the eighteenth century, Joseph II., Gustavus III. and the Grand Duke Paul of Russia—early in the nineteenth, Napoleon and Maria Louisa, were to visit the dwelling, authentic or non-authentic, within which the posthumous worship of a late-born religion had been set up. Napoleon it appears, showed little interest, and Marie Louise burst out laughing, when she saw how poor a spot it was.² But in 1814 Alexander I. decorated it with a commemorative slab of white marble. The poet Joukovski, going thither with the future Emperor Alexander II., pencilled the cottage walls with some enthusiastic lines, saluting the cradle of Russia under that humble roof. Modern tourists may read the following distich, beside a portrait of the great man :

‘ Nichts ist
den grooten man
te Klein.’

The cottage, which stands on the Krimp, in the western and somewhat retired quarter of the town, is a wooden structure on a brick-built foundation. Guerrit Kist, or Boij Thijsen, shared it, in the year 1697, with a widow, who relinquished her lodging to Peter in consideration of a rent of seven florins—which he omitted to pay ; he was always apt to forget such matters. There is one room only, a funnel-shaped chimney-corner, with wooden jambs and mantel-piece, a sort of wooden cupboard with folding doors, wire-latticed, and hung with curtains, in which the sleeping-mattress was placed (*betsteede*) and a ladder leading to the attic ; no other furniture which can have been used by the tenant in 1697, all the rest was bought by the Empress Elizabeth, and carried off to Russia. The house, which, after

¹ Meermann, *Lecture on Peter the Great's First Journey* (Paris, 1812), p. 59, etc. ; Nartof, *Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (St. Petersburg, 1891), pp. 5-7 ; *Noomen's unpublished Journal* in the Utrecht Library. This journal is shortly to be published by Professor Kort, of Dorpat (Iourief). Scheltema relied on it absolutely. Noomen was a Zaandam cloth-merchant.

² Scheltema, *Historical Anecdotes of Peter the Great* (Lausanne, 1842), p. 409.

the Tsar's departure, was the home of several generations of artisans, was for a long time utterly forgotten; it is just possible that it may have been recognised. A sort of arched shed, built by the King of Holland, surrounds and preserves what now remains of it;—the western side, that is to say, consisting of two rooms with a loft above them, all of them sinking under the weight of the ruined roof. The right side of the building and the chimney have utterly disappeared. The Dutch quite lately made over these relics to the Russian Government, and this has taken fresh measures for their preservation, which may be indispensable, but which are somewhat distressing to lovers of the picturesque. There is even a *Calorifère!*

A picture of the Dutch school, once at the Mon Plaisir Palace at Peterhof, representing a man in a red waist-coat, clasping a girl of very opulent charms, long had the reputation of being a memento of the great man's visit to Saardam. This canvas, now at the Hermitage Palace, was certainly not painted from nature, for the artist, I. I. Horemans, was not born till 1715. Nartof, who was, in later years, a member of Peter's intimate circle, mentions the girl, who, he says, would not consent to accept Peter's advances, till a glance into the stranger's purse had convinced her he was no common boatman; and in a fragment of a letter in Leibnitz's collection, which bears no indication of its origin, I find, under the date of 27th Nov. 1697, the following lines:—'The Tsar has happened on a peasant girl of Saardam, who pleases his fancy, and on holidays, he betakes himself there alone in his boat, to take his pleasure with her, after the manner of Hercules.'¹

Peter found better employment at Amsterdam. His arrival there was awaited by a friend, well-nigh a collaborator, the burgomaster of the town, Nicholas Witsen. This official, who had visited Russia during the reign of Alexis, and written a celebrated book on Eastern and Southern Tartary, who was the constant correspondent of Lefort, and acted as his master's intermediary in the matter of the ships ordered, and other purchases made by him, in Holland, could not fail to offer the traveller the heartiest welcome. He lost no time in obtaining access for him to the great shipbuilding yards of the East Indian Company. This marks the

¹ Guerrier, *Leibnitz Correspondence* (St. Petersburg, 1873), p. 31.

opening of the serious work and usefulness of Peter's first journey.

The man himself was still unchanged, with his fads and his oddities, his queer habits and grimaces. He still pretended to hide himself under the name of 'Master Peter' (*Peterbas*) or 'Carpenter Peter of Zaandam,' shamming deafness if he was addressed in any other manner, and thus contrived to make himself more remarkable than ever. When his Embassy went to the Hague, to be received in solemn audience, he refused to accompany it, but intimated his desire to watch the reception from a neighbouring room. Some company having entered this apartment, the Tsar desired to leave it, but, finding that, for this purpose, he was obliged to cross the audience-chamber, he requested that the members of the States-General should turn their faces to the wall, so that they might not see him!¹ He reached the Hague at eleven o'clock at night. At the Amsterdam hotel, to which he was first conducted, he refused the fine bed prepared for him, in the best room, and insisted on climbing up to the roof, to choose some tiny chamber. Then changing his mind utterly, he resolved to seek a lodging elsewhere. Thus it came about that the *Old Doelen* Inn had the honour of his presence. One of his servants was there already, sleeping in a corner on his bear-skin. The Tsar kicked him to his feet; 'Give me thy place!'²

He stopped his carriage twenty times between Amsterdam and the Hague, to measure the width of a bridge, go into a mill, which he had to reach by crossing a meadow, where the water was often up to his knees, or enter some middle-class house, whose inhabitants he caused, first of all, to be sent outside. Wherever he went, his insatiable curiosity and whimsicality went with him. He barely escaped maiming himself by suddenly stopping a saw-mill. He clung to the driving wheel in a silk factory, at the risk of being carried away by one of the secondary wheels; he studied architecture with Simon Schynvoet of Leyden, mechanics with Van der Heyden, fortification with Coehorn, whom he tried hard to enlist in his own service,—printing with one of the Tessing brothers,—anatomy with Ruysch, natural history with Leuwenhoek. He took the gentlemen of his suite into the celebrated Boerhaave's anatomical theatre,

¹ Scheltema, pp. 140-142.

² *Ibid.*

and when they expressed some disgust at the preparations they saw there, he forced them to bite into the corpse which was being dissected. He learned to use compass, and sword, and plane, and even the instruments of a tooth-drawer, whom he saw, one day, operating in the open air, in a public square. He built a frigate, he made his own bed, in a public cooking, constructed a Russian bath for his own use;¹ he took drawing lessons too, and learned to engrave on copper, frequented the studio of Koerten Block, sat to her for his portrait, wrote his name in her album, and himself engraved a plate showing forth the triumph of the Christian religion over the Moslem faith.²

There is more feverish activity than reasoned application about all this, a great deal of caprice too, and even a touch of insanity. The notions of science and art thus picked up are somewhat disconcerting. 'If you want to build a ship,' we read in one of Peter's note-books belonging to this period, 'you must begin, after taking the superficial area, by making a right angle at each end.'³ Napoleon, with all the universality of his genius,—the widest and the most comprehensive our modern world has ever known,—never pretended to be a great doctor or a skilful etcher. All his practical knowledge was specialised. Yet Peter was following an instinct which was not to play him false. He was giving himself the best of preparations for the real task which awaited him,—not the building of ships, or of factories, or of palaces (foreign specialists could always be brought in for such purposes), but the inauguration of a whole plan of civilisation. He was, after all, carrying on the process which had begun with his first uncertain gropings amongst the exotic riches of the *Oroujennaïa Palata*, the inventory—inevitably hasty, and summary—of the various treasures, industrial, scientific, and artistic, which he proposed to borrow from the Western world. But as his field of curiosity enlarged, and, with it, his mind widened, the careless child, the inattentive youth, of former days, showed more and more of the qualities of the Sovereign. Often, at Péréiaslavl, or at Archangel, he had

¹ Meermann, p. 60.

² Scheltema, *Russia and the Low Countries* (Amsterdam, 1817), vol. i. p. 221; F. Müller, *Attempt at a Russian-Netherland Bibliography*, pp. 164, 165; Piekarski, *Literature and Science in Russia* (St. Petersburg, 1862), vol. i. p. 9. The engraving referred to is in the Amsterdam Museum.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 93.

utterly forgotten Moscow, and the rest of his empire. But this was past. Far as he was from his capital, and the frontiers of his country, he insisted on being kept informed of the smallest details in the management of those public affairs, which he had once so willingly neglected. He would know everything that happened, hour by hour; and many things were happening. Even the momentary application of his energetic activity in that direction had borne fruit. Near Azof, the forts of Alexis and of Peter were in course of building, at Taganrog, two more forts, named after the Trinity and St. Paul, and a harbour, were being constructed. On the Dnieper, the Turkish attacks on the fortresses of Kazykermen and of Tavan had been victoriously repulsed. The navy, too, was making rapid progress. The King of Sweden had sent 300 cannon to arm the ships, either not dreaming they might ever be turned against himself, or heroically indifferent to that possibility. Augustus was strengthening his position in Poland. Of all these things Peter was informed; he kept up an active correspondence with the persons charged to represent him at the head of the Government. Romodanovski gave him news of the *Streltsy*, Vinnius wrote to ask him for Dutch gunsmiths. He did even better than to send him these. He set about recruiting a whole staff, most numerous and varied, which was to second him in that work of transformation, the plan of which was growing clearer and clearer in his brain;—a skilled boatswain, of Norwegian birth, Cornelius Cruys, whom he made an admiral; several naval captains, three-and-twenty commanders, five-and-thirty lieutenants, seventy-two pilots, fifty physicians; three hundred and forty-five sailors, and four cooks. These men would need special stores. He set himself to collect and send them off. Two hundred and sixty cases, filled with guns, pistols, cannon, sail-cloth, compasses, saws, cabinet-makers' tools, whale-bone, cork, and anchors, and marked with the letters P.M. (Peter Mihailof) were despatched to Moscow. One consignment—the germ of the future School of Fine Arts—consisted of eight blocks of marble, designed, no doubt, to rouse the inspiration of future artists. Another case contained a stuffed crocodile. Here we have the nucleus of a museum.¹ There were occasional checks in this wonderful activity,—a

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 104-110.

pause, now and then, in the Sovereign's correspondence with his representatives. Peter's answers were sometimes slow in coming. He would soon excuse himself shyly, almost humbly—the fault lay with Hmielnitski, the Russian Bacchus.¹ Lefort's pupil had not—never was to—cast off the old man in this respect. The weaknesses of the daily guest at the *Sloboda* banquets still clung to him. But, in spite of all, he found means, during those four months spent in Holland, to accomplish an enormous amount of work.

He was left in perfect freedom for the purpose. His eight days' visit to Zaandam had revolutionised the village. At Amsterdam, once the first moment of surprise was past, his presence was almost unobserved. It was not till some years later that the greatness of the part he was called to play, and the frequency of his visits to Europe, drew public attention to his relatively obscure beginnings. And then, taken at a disadvantage, finding no trace of its hero in the turmoil of the great maritime city, the legend was fain to seek its guiding marks in a more modest spot, and thus settled at Zaandam. The immediate impression left there, by the visit of Peter Mihailof and his noisy comrades, is clearly shown in the two following extracts from contemporary chronicles.

The Records of the Lutheran community at Zaandam:—

'He came incognito, with very few followers, spent a week at Krimpenburg, in the house of a blacksmith, of the name of Boij Thijsen, and then went to Amsterdam, where his great Embassy had arrived. He was seven feet high, wore the dress of the peasants of Zaandam, worked in the admiralty dockyard, and is a great admirer of ship-building.'

Noomen's *Journal*:—

'Thus were the State and our little town of Westzaandam delivered and released from these celebrated, numerous, distinguished, extraordinary, and very costly visitors.'

A resolution of the States General, dated 15th August 1698, informs us that the entertainment of the Embassy cost the State 100,000 florins. Neither this document, nor any

¹ Hmielnitski was the victorious Chief who led the Cossacks in their struggle against the Poles in the seventeenth century. Both in Russian, and in Polish, the word Hmiel means *hops*, and also *drunkenness*.

of the other resolutions referring to the stay of the Ambassadors at Amsterdam, contains any reference to Peter himself.¹

III

In the seventeenth century, the Amsterdam shipbuilders had a well-deserved reputation, but they were more practical than learned. Their processes differed in different ship-yards, but no consistent theory, no carefully thought-out justification of traditional proportions and methods, existed in any one of them. Peter, as his study of the craft advanced, became aware of this, and the fact distressed him. The why and the wherefore, and with that, all chance of making the principle his own, were beginning to escape him. An Englishman whom he met at the country house of the cloth-merchant, John Tessing, boasted of the superiority of English shipbuilders in this respect. 'In his country,' he said, 'theory and practice went hand in hand.' Thus it came about, that in January, 1698, the young Tsar was induced to cross the Channel.

He had met William III. already, both at Utrecht and at the Hague, and was assured of a courteous welcome. A yacht belonging to the Royal Navy, with an escort of three battle-ships, was sent to fetch him from Amsterdam. Vice-Admiral Mitchell, and the Marquis of Caermarthen—this last an oddity, and almost as heroic a brandy-drinker as Lefort himself,—were attached to the person of the Imperial guest. Some uncertainty exists regarding the house inhabited by the Tsar, during his stay in London. Some believe it to have been 15 Buckingham Street, Strand, on the walls of which a commemorative inscription is now placed. Others opine that he lived in Norfolk Street. When the English King entered the room selected by Peter for his own use, and in which he slept, with three or four of his servants, His Majesty almost fainted. The air was foul, and quite unbreathable; in spite of the cold, all the windows had to be thrown open. Yet, when Peter returned William's visit at Kensington Palace, he gave proof of very evident progress,

¹ Dutch State Papers, The Hague. See, with reference to Peter's visit to Holland, besides the authorities already quoted, A. Iazykof, *Peter the Great at Zaandam and Amsterdam* (Berlin, 1872).

in many social matters. He had a long conversation in Dutch with the King, he was assiduously polite to Princess Anne, the heir to the throne, and was so much delighted with her conversation that, in writing to one of his friends, he described her as 'a true daughter of our church.' An apparatus for showing the direction of the wind, placed in the King's cabinet, interested him greatly, but he only cast a careless glance on the marvels of art which filled the palace. His visit was, on the whole, a failure, the impression he produced being far from favourable. The inhabitants of this home of culture, and refined elegance, were more difficult to please than the ladies of Koppenbrügge. A few years later, Burnet, in his memoirs, almost seems to apologise to his readers, for speaking of so sorry a personage.¹ Was such a man likely to be fit to govern a great empire? The Bishop doubts it. A promising shipwright he might be. He had not been seen to interest himself in any other matter, and even in that, he was disposed to give too much attention to mere detail. Thus does the great Whig historian lay his unerring finger on the weak points of a marvellous genius, without ever seeming to suspect the existence of those powers, which, in a future page, I shall endeavour to demonstrate. But these written impressions cannot have been absolutely fresh, and distance, doubtless, deceived him with an optical illusion, analogous to that the effects of which we have already noticed in Holland.

Peter remained in England almost as long as he had tarried with the Dutch, and here, too, he gave his mind to many things. With all his usual curiosity, minuteness, and practical-mindedness, he made the tour of every public establishment likely to furnish him with useful information for his future creations—the Mint—the Observatory—the Royal Society. Though the pictures in Kensington Palace did not transport him with admiration, he had his portrait painted by Kneller, the pupil of Rembrandt and of Ferdinand Bol. This picture, preserved at Hampton Court, is one of the best of him in existence. He took his pleasure too, giving free rein to his five-and-twenty years, and making practical acquaintance with local manners and customs. The servant-girl of the Zaandam inn was replaced by an actress, Mrs. Cross, who, so it would appear, had reason to

¹ Vol. ii. p. 221, etc.

complain of the Tsar's stinginess; but he sharply reproved the persons who ventured to lecture him on this subject. 'I find plenty of men to serve me well, with all their heart and mind, for 500 guineas. This person has only served me tolerably, and what she has to give is worth much less.'¹ He won back his 500 guineas, over a match, fought in the house of the Duke of Leeds, between a Grenadier of his own suite, and a celebrated native boxer. Six weeks out of the three months were devoted to pursuing,—at Deptford, a village formerly on the outskirts of the capital, now merged within it—those studies for which the Amsterdam shipyard had not sufficed him. Here too he delighted in masquerading as a working apprentice, walking through the streets with his hatchet on his shoulder, and drinking beer and smoking a small Dutch pipe in a tavern, which, until the year 1808, bore the name of the Tsar's Tavern, and showed his portrait on its signboard. Behold a new field for the legend-mongers, who did not fail to take advantage of it! Even Burnet's usually clear vision and faithful memory were thus led astray. But there is no uncertainty as to the residence occupied by Peter at Deptford. Its identity has been further established by witnesses, before a Court of Justice. When the owner, John Evelyn, re-took possession of his dwelling, which he had given up temporarily for the use of the Russian Sovereign, he found it in a condition which might have suggested the idea that Baty-Han himself had been there. Doors and windows had been torn out and burnt, hangings dragged down and soiled, valuable pictures utterly ruined, and their frames smashed to pieces. Evelyn claimed, and received, reimbursement of his loss from the public Treasury.² This mansion, Sayes Court, though half-ruined at the present day, standing in the middle of the docks, and used as a police-barrack and counting-house,—is still bound up with the memory of the illustrious guest it once sheltered. The street by which it is approached is even now called Tsar's Street.

Peter toiled hard at Deptford, under the direction of the famous Anthony Dean, whose father had made himself unpopular by passing over into France, and there teaching the art of shipbuilding. In a letter dated March 4th, 1619,

¹ Nartof, p. 9. The original expression is even coarser yet.

² Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 30.

referring to some excess committed at Moscow by one of his provisional representatives, while in a state of intoxication, he writes, not without a touch of melancholy regret, 'We run no risk of doing anything of that kind here, seeing we are immersed in study from morning till night.' But even at Deptford, his toil as an apprentice and his passion for all sea-faring matters did not completely absorb him. As in Holland, his interests and his studies took every possible direction. He kept adding recruits to the body of his future collaborators—workmen and overseers for his mines in the Ural, engineers who were to cut a canal which was to join the Caspian and the Black Sea by the Volga and the Don. He and Lord Caermarthen negotiated the concession of the Russian tobacco monopoly to a group of English capitalists, in return for the somewhat modest sum of 48,000 roubles, which he needed to balance the budget of his Embassy. Burnet forgot all that. Yet legend speaks of an uncut diamond, wrapped in a scrap of dirty paper,—the symbolic gift which Peter is said to have conferred on his royal host ere he departed. But at Koenigsberg, if the story-tellers are to be believed, he tossed a huge ruby into the bosom of the Electress' low-cut gown, as he sat at table with her.¹ Now the Electress did not go to Koenigsberg!

IV

By the end of April, Peter was back in Holland, and before long he was on his way to Vienna. The request for aid against the Turks, addressed to the States General by the Embassy, had not been favourably received. The States had even gone so far as to suggest to the King of England that he should mediate between the Ottoman Porte and Austria, so as to place that country in a position to turn all her forces against France, in the fresh struggle which was so evidently approaching,—for the health of Charles II. of Spain was rapidly declining. This blow must be parried. Unfortunately, the movements of the Russian monarch's huge Embassy were very slow. It must take

¹ Coxe's *Travels* (London, 1874), vol. iv. p. 87. Niestroief, 'Peter the Great's Visit to Holland and England,' in the *Messenger Universel*, 1871.

three weeks to reach the capital of the Holy Empire. According to German official sources, its retinue was thus composed:—One court marshal, one equerry, one major-domo, four chamberlains, four dwarfs, six pages, six trumpeters, one cup-bearer, one cook, one quarter-master, twelve lacqueys, six coachmen and postillions, twenty-four serving-men, thirty-two footmen, twenty-two carriage horses, thirty-two four-horsed carriages, and four six-horse waggons for the baggage, and twelve saddle-horses.¹ Yet Peter proposed to enter Leopold's capital at eleven o'clock at night, and in the fourth coach, so as to pass unnoticed. At the very last moment the plan failed, and everything turned out ill for every one. The Embassy, with its endless train of followers, was forced to kick its heels one whole long day, just without the approaches to the town. The road was blocked by a great march-past of troops, not to be interrupted for such a trifle. Peter, caring nothing for the troops, jumped into a post-cart, with a single servant, and pushed forward. Yet the incident annoyed him much, and gave him an equal sense of discomfort. He was sorely put out of countenance, and the appearance of the Imperial residence only deepened the impression. The whole place awed him, with its air of implacable pride, haughty etiquette, and inaccessible majesty. The Imperial ministers, already deeply engaged with Holland and with England, sought every pretext to delay the audience solicited by his Ambassadors. He, to cut things short, demanded a personal interview with the Emperor, and met with a prompt refusal. By what right? it was inquired. Here was Peter Mihailof's first lesson in diplomacy. He began to understand the inconvenience of disguises. Three times he returned to the charge. At last the Vice-Chancellor of Bohemia, Czernini, was sent to him. 'What do you want?' 'To see the Emperor, and speak with him on urgent affairs.' 'What affairs? Are the Ambassadors of your country not here to see to them?' The poor disguised Tsar beat a hasty retreat; 'He would not even mention affairs,' he said.

A meeting was appointed at the Favorita Palace. He was to enter by a private staircase, a small spiral one com-

¹ Weber, *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1873), vol. xi. p. 338.

municating with the Park. He agreed to everything. Once in the Emperor Leopold's presence, he forgot himself so far as to attempt to kiss his hand. He evidently felt himself very small and inferior; he kept putting his hat on, and pulling it off, nervously, and could not make up his mind to keep it on his head, in spite of the Emperor's repeated requests that he should do so. The interview, which lasted a quarter of an hour, was of the most commonplace description. Lefort interpreted, for Peter did not dare to fall back on his own bad German. It was not till he had left the Palace that he regained his self-possession, and then, in an instant, all the natural and exuberant gaiety of the man returned. A boat lay moored on a little pond in the Park. He rushed to it, and rowed about till he was out of breath. He was like any school-boy, just escaped from the trials of a difficult examination.¹

But the interview bore no fruit. The Emperor was quite resolved to respect Peter Mihaïlof's incognito. At the banquet which followed the audience at last granted to the Embassy, the young Sovereign, bitten afresh with his old mania, insisted on standing behind Lefort's chair. He was allowed to do so without protest. The political proposals he had come to make, by no means fell in with the decided intentions of the Austrian Court, which was bent on having peace with the Turks at any price. Yet Peter took great pains to give satisfaction in these new surroundings. He was much more circumspect than elsewhere. He paid a visit—at the Favorita, again, and almost secretly—to the Empress and the Imperial Princesses, and did his best to make himself pleasant. He even ventured some advances towards the dominant Church, and went so far as to rouse hopes among the Catholics, similar to those he had already roused amongst the Protestants. On St. Peter's Day he was present, with his whole Embassy, at a solemn service in the Jesuit Church, where he listened to a sermon preached in Slav by Father Wolff, and heard the preacher say 'that the keys would be bestowed a second time, upon a new Peter, that he might open another *door*.' He composed, and lighted with his own hands, the fireworks which formed part of an entertainment given, that same day, by his Ambassadors, to

¹ Vienna State Papers, Ceremonial-Protocolle. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iii. pp. 126, 127; Sheiner, p. 372.

the cream of Viennese society, and which, according to the Tsar's testimony, wound up in very much the same fashion as the fetes in the *Sloboda*. According to one of his letters to Vinnius, a great deal of wine was drunk, and there was considerable love-making in the gardens.¹ Shortly afterwards, the Emperor invited the Ambassadors to a masked ball, at which Peter wore the dress of a Friesland peasant. The Emperor and Empress appeared as the host and hostess of an inn. Innkeeping (*das Wirthschaft*) was as much in fashion, at that moment, as shepherds and shepherdesses and all pastoral matters were soon to be. But this entertainment had no official character whatever. At supper Peter sat between Freilin von Turn, who was his own pendant, as a Friesland peasant, and the wife of Marshal von Staremburg, who wore a Swabian costume. A few days later the Embassy departed. The diplomatic object of the journey had utterly failed, and the scientific resources of Vienna had been no compensation for Peter's disappointment in this respect. He desired to go to Venice, there to study a form of shipbuilding, new to him as yet—those oared galleys which were to play such a great part in the future of the Russian navy. Just as the travelling preparations were completed, the Tsar was compelled to stop short. Serious news had arrived from Russia.

'The seed of the Miloslavski has sprouted once again.' Thus he picturesquely describes it. There was a fresh mutiny amongst the *Streltsy*. Like a flash his mind was made up, and the direction of his journey changed from south to east. A few days later he was at Cracow. 'You will see me sooner than you think for,' he had written to Romodanovski, whom he accused of weakness and pusillanimity. But more reassuring news awaited him in the old Polish capital: Shein, his generalissimo, had put down the rebels; Moscow was safe. He slackened his pace a little, halted at Rawa, and there spent three days with Augustus II. The history of this meeting, which was to give birth to the Northern War, belongs to another chapter of this book. As far as Peter's studies are concerned, his journey ended at Vienna. Before setting forth its consequences, distant and immediate—the creation, in other words,

¹ *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 263.

on the confines of ancient Europe, of a new power, political, social, and economic, and the transformation, political, social, and economic too, of a certain area of the old European continent—I must fully describe the physical traits and mental characteristics of the man who was to be the instrument to perform this revolution. Standing on the threshold of the work, I must endeavour to picture forth its maker.

PART II
THE MAN



BOOK I—BODY AND MIND

CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL PORTRAIT—CHARACTERISTIC TRAITS

- I. Pen and pencil portraits—Kneller and Von Moor—St. Simon—Strength and nervousness—Twitchings—Oddities of dress—The lay figure in the Winter Palace—What his dress really was—Darned stockings and cobbled shoes—The *Doubina*.
- II. Temperament—The delight of action—An audience at 4 o'clock in the morning—A working day of 14 hours—Ubiquity and universality—statesman, drum-major, dancing-master, fireman, major-domo, physician—The Tsar and his negro boy—The individual and the race—Russian indolence—Agreement of physical and moral phenomena—Long winters, and short-lived springs—Periods of inertia, and fits of feverish activity—The heroes of the National Legend.
- III. Was Peter brave?—Narva and Poltava—The idea of duty—Contradictions—Moral energy and weakness—Inconstancy and versatility in detail—Steadiness and perseverance in the whole undertaking—Peter's impulsiveness—Traits of the national character—Brain and heart—Want of feeling—Cheery and sociable disposition—Boyish pranks—Why he was disliked—Frequent fits of violence and rage—Sword thrusts.
- IV. Drinking excesses—A scene of bloodshed in the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers—The Tsar not sober—Habitual drunkenness—Its results.
- V. Coarse pleasures—Banquets and orgies—Female drunkards—A regular tippler—Theological controversies at table—Peter's tastes are those of the public-house and the servants' hall—Was he cruel?—Judge and executioner—Reasons of State—Idealism and sensuality—The bondage of the Law.

I

THE picture of Peter, painted in London by Sir Godfrey Kneller, in 1698, shows us a fine young fellow of gracious and manly presence. The features are refined and regular, the expression full of dignity and pride; the wide-open eyes and somewhat full, half-smiling, lips, are instinct with beauty and intelligence. The physical mark discreetly indicated on the right cheek—the wart of the description sent to the Zaandam workman—rouses confidence in the artist's fidelity.

Yet this same fidelity has been much disputed. Not to mention the hideous waxen figure which dishonours the gallery of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, Leroi and Caravaque, as also Dannhauer, and even Karl Von Moor—with whose work Peter himself was so well pleased, that he sent the portrait from the Hague to Paris, in 1717, to have it reproduced at the Gobelins Factory—were all of them far less flattering.¹ The portraits painted on the spot, and at the same period (1717) by Nattier and Rigaud, pleased the Tsar less. They have a somewhat arch expression, and give nothing of that fierce, and almost savage look of power, which Moor so successfully indicated.

True it is, indeed, that twenty years—and what eventful ones!—had passed over the Tsar, between the date of Kneller's picture and that of Moor's. But Noomen saw the great man before Kneller met him, and in his Journals, I find this rough and evidently frank description:—'Tall and robust, of ordinary corpulence, lively and quick in all his movements, the face round, the expression rather severe, the eyebrows dark, like the short curling hair . . . he walks with long steps, swinging his arms, grasping a new hatchet haft in his hand.' The vanished hero stands before us! Again, about the same period, under the hand of Cardinal Kollonitz, Primate of Hungary, who met the Tsar at Vienna in 1698, and was rather benevolently inclined towards him than otherwise—I read as follows:—'Neither in his person, his aspect, nor his manners, is there anything to specially distinguish him, and betray his princely quality.'² St. Simon's portrait is well known. I should be disposed to adopt it, as indicating a happy medium—for all the contemporary documents on which I have been able to lay my hand, agree with it in every essential point. Here are two, deposited amongst the papers of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, during the Tsar's residence in Paris in 1717. 'His features were rather handsome, they even showed a certain gentleness, and no one would have thought, on looking at him, that he would occasionally take to cutting off the heads of those of his subjects who displeased him. He would have

¹ Rovinski, *Dictionary of Engraved Portraits*, p. 1572. The whereabouts of the original of this portrait is unknown.

² Theiner, p. 372. Compare Ruzini's *Account sent from Venice to Vienna*; *Fontes rerum Austriacarum* (Vienna, 1867), Part II. vol. xxvii. p. 429.

been a very well-built prince, but that he carried himself so badly. He walked with round shoulders, worse than any Dutch sailor, whose ways he seemed to copy. He had large eyes, a good nose and mouth, a pleasant face, though somewhat pale, and light brown hair kept rather short. He made endless grimaces. One of his commonest tricks was to try to look at his sword by bending his head backwards over his shoulder, and to raise one of his legs and stretch it out behind him. He sometimes turned his head as if he desired to bring his face above the middle of his shoulders. Those who waited on him asserted that this kind of convulsion always came upon him when his thoughts were very earnestly fixed on any special subject.¹ And again 'The Tsar is exceedingly tall, somewhat bowed, his head generally bent down, he is very dark, and there is a something wild in his look. His mind appears bright, and his understanding very ready. There is a sort of grandeur in his manners, but this is not always kept up.'² The disagreement as to the colour of Peter's hair may be put down to the fault of the wig-makers, he having adopted the style of hair-dressing peculiar to the European dress of that date. All are agreed as to his grimaces, and nervous tricks, the perpetual shaking of his head, the round-shoulderedness which struck the Emperor's Ministers in 1698, when he was only 24, and the fierce expression of his eyes. The Archbishop of Novgorod, Ianovski, admitted to audience to kiss the hands of Ivan and of Peter, when the two brothers shared the throne, felt no alarm when he approached the elder sovereign. But when he met the younger Tsar's glance, he felt his knees shake under him, and, from that day forward, the presentiment that he would be done to death by that second hand, which his trembling lips had scarcely touched, was always with him.

'It is well known,' says Staehlin, 'that this monarch, from his early youth until his death, was subject to short but frequent brain attacks, of a somewhat violent kind. A sort of convulsion seized him, which for a certain time, and sometimes even for some hours, threw him into such a distressing condition, that he could not bear the sight of any one, not even his nearest friends. This paroxysm was always pre-

¹ *Mémoires et Documents* (Russie), vol. ii. p. 117.

² Despatch from M. de Liboy—sent to Dunkirk to receive the Tsar, April 23, 1717.

ceded by a strong contortion of the neck towards the left side, and by a violent contraction of the muscles of the face.'¹ Hence arose, doubtless, Peter's perpetual recourse to remedies, some of them occasionally very strange, as for instance, a certain powder, compounded of the interior and the wings of a magpie.² Hence too, his habit of sleeping with his two hands clasping the shoulders of an orderly officer.³ Some people have tried to believe this last fact to have given rise to the malevolent suppositions which have hovered round the private morals of this sovereign. But this explanation is, unfortunately, far from being sufficient. In 1718, while at table with the Queen of Prussia, Peter began to wave one of his hands—that holding his knife—in so violent a fashion, that Sophia Charlotte took fright and would have left her seat. He, to reassure her, seized her arm, but squeezed it so tightly, that she cried out. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Catherine's bones are not so tender!' he was heard to remark aloud.⁴

These traits of nervous delicacy had already appeared in the case of Ivan the Terrible, and probably arose from the same cause—the excess and violence of the shocks undergone in infancy and childhood. It was the legacy of old Russia—represented by the *Streltsy*, and doomed to death already—to her great Reformer. But with the poison, happily, she bestowed the antidote—that mighty work which was to purify his blood and invigorate his nerves. Ivan had no such good fortune.

To sum it up, Peter may be described, physically, as a fine man, exceedingly tall (his exact height was 6 ft. 8½ in.),⁵ dark—'extremely dark, as if he had been born in Africa,' says one of his contemporaries⁶—powerful in frame, with a good deal of majesty about him, marred by certain faults of deportment, and a painful infirmity, which spoilt the general effect. He dressed carelessly, put on his clothes awry, frequently appeared in a most untidy condition, was always changing his garments, military or civil, and would occasionally select a garb of the most grotesque description. He had

¹ *Anecdotes* (Richou's translation, Strasburg, 1787), p. 80.

² Scherer's *Anecdotes* (Paris, 1792), vol. ii. p. 82.

³ Nartof, p. 29.

⁴ *Memoirs of the Margravine of Baireuth*.

⁵ Two Archines, and fourteen Verchoks, Golikof, *History of Peter the Great* (Moscow, 1842), vol. x. p. 170.

⁶ Louville's *Memoirs* (Paris, 1818), vol. ii. p. 239.

no sense whatever of propriety in dress. He showed himself to the Danes, at Copenhagen, in 1716, with a green cap on his head, a black military cravat tightly buckled round his neck, and his shirt collar fastened by a big silver button, set with mock stones, such as his own officers were in the habit of wearing. A brown overcoat with horn buttons, coarse worsted stockings, full of darns, and very dirty shoes, completed his costume.¹ He agreed to wear a wig, but insisted on its being very short, so that he might be able to thrust it into his pocket; and his own hair, which he rarely cut, showed far below it.

His hair grew naturally very long and thick. In 1722, during his Persian Campaign, being inconvenienced by its quantity, he had it cut, but, being very economical in mind, he insisted on having a new wig made out of it, which wig now figures on the lay figure in the Winter Palace. It is indeed the only genuine thing about that figure; the waxen face, with its glass eyes, was modelled on a cast taken after death, and the weight of the plaster on the decomposing flesh threw all proportions out. Peter's cheeks were naturally full and round. He never wore the coat of pale blue gros de Tours, silver-trimmed, nor the sword-belt embroidered to match, and the silver-clocked poppy-coloured stockings, in which the figure is dressed up, but once in all his life. That was at Moscow, in 1724, on the day of Catherine's Coronation. She had worked with her own hands on the splendid garment, and he consented to wear it for the occasion. But he kept to his old cobbled shoes. The rest of his authentic and everyday garments are placed in two wardrobes which surround the throne—itsself a mock one, on which the lay figure is seated. There is a thick cloth cloak, worn threadbare, a hat devoid of lace, pierced by a bullet at Poltava, and some grey woollen stockings, full of darns. In the corner stands the famous *doubina*, a fairly thick ivory-headed rattan cane, with which we shall make closer acquaintance.

The sovereign's intimate circle frequently saw him in his shirt-sleeves, for, even at table, he never scrupled to take off his coat if he was too hot. Restraint, of any kind, he never would endure.

¹ Lundblad, *Life of Charles XII.* (German Translation, Jenssen-Tuch, Hamburg, 1837), vol. i. p. 86.

II

‘The soul’s joy lies in doing.’ The greatest of northern poets was swift to recognise the hero of that mighty series of brilliant exploits, the image of which I would fain evoke, and has summed him up—his temperament, his character, and almost all his genius—in those few words. As Pösselt says, ‘*In Thatendrange war sein wahres Genie*’:—Yes; his strength, his greatness, and his ultimate success, were all of them due to that vital energy which made him, both physically and morally, the most turbulent man, the most indifferent to fatigue, the most intensely sensible of the *joy of action*, whom the world has ever seen. Nothing more natural than that the legends should have described him as a supposititious child, the son of foreign parents. His whole nature appears utterly at variance with the surroundings into which he was born. He has no prejudices, and his Russian subjects brim over with them. They are fanatics in their own religion; he is almost a Free-thinker. They look askance at every novelty; he is never weary of innovations. They are fatalists; he, an originating force. They worship form and ceremony; he views all such things with an almost cynical scorn. Finally, and above all, they are indolent, lazy, emotionless,—frozen, as it were, into a perpetual winter, or slumbering in some everlasting dream. He, driven by the feverish love of movement and of labour, which I have already described, wakes them roughly from their torpor, and their sluggish inactivity, with downright blows, falling on them with sticks, and, not unfrequently, with axes. It would be interesting to follow his perpetual comings and goings, even during the space of a few months. Cast a mere glance over the list of his correspondence with Catherine—some 223 letters, published, in 1861, by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The various dates—from Lemberg in Galicia, from Marienwerder in Prussia, from Tsaritsin on the Volga,—in the south of his empire, from Vologda, in the north, from Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen—make the brain reel. One moment he is in the depths of Finland inspecting forests; then again in the Ural inspecting mines. Soon he is in Pomerania, taking part in a siege; in the Ukraine, where he is occupied in breeding sheep; at the brilliant

Court of some German prince, where he acts as his own Ambassador; and then, suddenly, in the Bohemian mountains, where he enacts the part of a private tourist. On the 6th of July, 1715, I find him at St. Petersburg, about to put to sea with his fleet. On the 9th he is back again in his capital, sending the Montenegrins a consolatory letter concerning the excesses committed on them by the Turks, signing a convention with the Prussian Minister, and giving Menshikof instructions as to the preservation of the timber in the neighbourhood of the town. On the 12th he is at Revel: on the 20th he has rejoined his fleet at Kronstadt, and has forthwith embarked with it.¹ And so on, year in and year out, from the beginning to the end of his life. He is always in a hurry: he makes his coachman drive full gallop; when he is on foot he never walks—he runs.

When did he take his rest, then? It is not easy to conceive. He would sit far into the night, glass in hand, but even then he was discussing, holding forth, trying his guests sorely, from time to time, with his sudden changes from gaiety to ill-humour, his sallies, his ill-bred jokes, and fits of fury; and he would give audiences at four o'clock in the morning. This was the hour for which he summoned his two Ambassadors, Ostermann and Boutourlin, before sending them to Stockholm, after the conclusion of peace with Sweden, in 1721. He received them, garbed in a short dressing-gown, below which his bare legs were exposed, a thick nightcap, lined with linen, on his head—for he perspired violently—and his stockings dropped down over his slippers. According to his orderly officer, he had been walking about for a considerable time, awaiting the arrival of the two gentlemen. Forthwith he fell upon them, questioned them closely, and in every direction, to make sure they thoroughly knew what they were about, and then, having dismissed them, dressed hastily, swallowed a glass of vodka (Russian brandy), and hurried off to his dockyards.²

Even the pleasures he permitted himself—banquets, illuminations, masquerades—imposed extra labour on him; he took more pains than actual relaxation, letting off his own fireworks, directing the order of processions, beating the big drum—for he was drum-major among other things—and leading the dances, for he had made a study of the chore-

¹ Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 33, 35, 321.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 267.

graphic art. In 1722 at Moscow, at the wedding of Count Golovin with the daughter of Prince Romodanovski, he performed the duties of the house-steward. The heat having become oppressive, he had the necessary tools for opening a window brought to him, and thus employed himself for half an hour. He went about gravely, carrying the staff, which was his sign of office, pirouetted before the bride, remained standing during the feast, directing the waiting, and ate nothing himself until all was over.¹ He gave personal and active attention to the treatment of his negro page, who suffered from tænia.²

But indeed his favourite occupation, even in his hours of recreation, was work, perpetual work. Thus he engraved on copper, and turned in ivory. In May 1711, the French envoy Baluze, to whom he had granted audience at Jaworow, in Poland, found him in the garden, in the company of a fair lady. He was pushing his suit with a charming Pole, Madame Sieniawska, and meanwhile, saw and plane in hand, he was busily engaged in building a boat!³

Nothing but illness, and consequent sheer inability to move, would induce him to cease, or even diminish, this wild expenditure of strength. And if this did occur, he was full of distress and regret, showering apologies on those who worked under him. 'Let them not,' so he writes, 'fancy he was idle; he was really incapable of moving, quite worn out.' And even while complaining and chafing against this condition of enforced inaction,—as, for example, in 1708, during a violent attack of scorbutic fever,—he would personally direct the repression of a Cossack revolt on the Don, the victualling of his armies, the building operations of various kinds already begun in his capital, and a mass of other details of every kind.⁴

Not one escapes him. At Archangel, on the Dvina, he takes it into his head to inspect every one of the boats which carry the rustic pottery, made in the neighbourhood, to the market. So vigorously does he set about it, that he ends by tumbling into the hold of one vessel, and smashing

¹ Bergholz's *Journal*, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 462; Hynerof, *The Countess Golovkin* (St. Petersburg, 1867), p. 102, etc.

² For this anecdote, with its coarse details, see Poushkin's *Works*, 1878 edition, vol. v. p. 278.

³ Despatch from Baluze to the King, May 12, 1711, French Foreign Office.

⁴ Golikof, vol. iii. p. 301.

a whole cargo of the fragile ware.¹ In January, 1722, at Moscow, after a night in carnival time, spent in driving from house to house in his sledge, singing carols after the manner of his country, and gathering a harvest of small coins, besides swallowing numerous glasses of wine, beer, and vodka, he hears, early in the morning, that a fire has broken out in a distant quarter. Thither he flies at once, and for two whole hours does fireman's duty ; after which he mounts his sledge again, and is seen tearing along as if he really desired to break his horses down. Be it remarked that he is occupied, at that same moment, with a serious change in the higher administration of his empire. He is about to break up his 'council of revision,' the duties of which are to be transferred to the Senate, besides which, he must shortly give orders concerning the funeral of a regimental major.²

In 1721, when he undertook the work of drawing up his Navy Regulations, he laid out a plan for the employment of his time, to which he closely adhered. According to his Journal, he wrote, during four days of the week, for fourteen hours a day,—from five in the morning till noon, and from four in the afternoon till eleven at night. This lasted from January to December 1721.³ The MS. of these Regulations, entirely in his hand, and full of corrections, is now amongst the Moscow archives. These also contain rough copies, written by the Tsar, which prove that a great number of the diplomatic documents respecting the Northern war, signed by the Chancellor Golovin, were directly inspired, and originally written, by his master. And the same may be said of the majority of the memorandums and important despatches signed by his ordinary political collaborators, Golovin, Shérémétief, and General Weyde, and yet more so in regard to the legislative and administrative work of his whole reign—the creation of the army and the fleet, the development of commerce and industry, the establishment of mills and factories, the organisation of justice, the repression of official corruption, the constitution of the national economy. He wrote all minutes, often several times over, drew up all schemes, and frequently

¹ Staehlin's *Anecdotes*, p. 110.

² Bergholz's *Journal*, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 360; *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 811.

³ Golikof, vol. ix. p. 27.

several editions of the same scheme. This did not prevent him from attending to all the details of the management of his own house, and even of the houses of his kinsfolk : as when, for example, he fixed the quantity and quality of the brandy to be supplied to his sister-in-law, the Tsarina Prascovia.¹

And yet in spite, and even because of it all, he was the true son of his country and of his race, and I, for my part, would readily stake my reputation on my certainty of his Russian origin. He corresponded to a certain phase of the national life, which clearly seems to betray the influence of the special conditions of physical existence in these latitudes. In Russia, after long and cruel winters, there come late and sudden springs, which instantly cover the waking earth with verdure, in a sudden explosion, as it were, of vernal forces. The same springtime awakenings, the same rushes of energetic growth, stir the souls of the men who inhabit these countries. The length and rigour of the winter season, which condemns them to a certain slothfulness of existence, make them indolent, without, as in hot Eastern countries, making them effeminate. Mind and spirit are braced, rather, by the enforced struggle with inclement and ungrateful nature. When the sun returns, the swiftly working elements must be swiftly followed, so as to crowd the work of several months into the space of a few weeks. This fact brings forth special physical and moral habits,—special aptitudes too ; and of these habits and aptitudes Peter is simply a particularly powerful expression. Such exceptional extremes as he may betray in these respects are doubtless the survival of the savage elementary forces, peculiar to the epic heroes of the Russian legend,—superhuman giants all, who bore the heavy burden of an excess of vigour they could not use,—wearied out by their own strength !

Peter, when he passes out of our sight, will leave the *Raskolniks*, who seek to relieve themselves of the same burden by galloping to and fro, on January nights, barefoot and in their shirts, and rolling in the snow.²

¹ Siémiewski, *The Tsarina Prascovia* (St. Petersburg, 1883), note to p. 58.

² Solovief, *History of Russia*, vol. xiii, p. 166, etc.

III

Did Peter's energy, and his enterprising—nay, his extraordinarily venturesome—genius, equal his courage?

He never sought danger, like his great Swedish adversary, —never found pleasure in it. In his earlier days, he gives us the impression of being a downright coward. My readers will not have forgotten his precipitate flight, on the night of August 6th, 1689, and his far from heroic appearance at the Troitsa. The same thing came to pass in 1700, under the walls of Narva:—In spite of the most ingenious explanations and apologies, the hideous fact remains. At the news of the unexpected approach of the King of Sweden, the Tsar left his army, made over the command to an as yet untried, and newly-enlisted Chief, to whom he gave written instructions, which bore traces, according to all competent judges, not of ignorance only, but of the greatest perturbation of mind. 'He is no soldier,' was the outspoken comment of the Saxon General Hallart, who saw him on this occasion, in the tent of the new Commander-in-Chief, the Prince de Croy, scared out of his wits, and half-distracted, making loud lamentations, and drinking bumper after bumper of brandy to pull himself together,—forgetting to date his written orders, or to have his official seal affixed to them.¹ Peter, in his own journal, has given us to understand that he was unaware of Charles XII.'s rapid march, and this flagrant falsehood amounts to an acknowledgment of his weakness.

Yet, he did his duty bravely at Poltava, exposing his person in the hottest of the struggle.² To this he made up his mind beforehand, as to any other trying and painful experience, showing no eagerness, but yet betraying no weakness, coldly, almost mournfully. There was nothing of the paladin about him, not a spark of the spirit of chivalry; and, in that point also, he was essentially Russian. Ill, and confined to his bed, early in that same year, he wrote to Menshikof, in a somewhat melancholy strain, desiring to be

¹ Documents published by Herrmann, in his *History of Russia*, vol. iv. p. 116; Vockerodt's Journal, published by Herrmann, *Russland unter Peter d. G.* (1872), p. 42; and Kelch, *Liefländische Geschichte* (1875), vol. ii. p. 156. All agree on this head.

² This is acknowledged even by Swedish historians. See Lundblad, vol. ii. p. 141.

warned whenever there was any certainty of a decisive action, for he 'could not expect,' he said, 'to escape that sort of affair.' His mind once made up, all the risks of the adventure, personal and other, seem equalised in his mind. He calculated them all, with the same composure, and accepted whatever came, with the same calmness of mind. When, in 1713, Vice-Admiral Cruys, desiring to prevent the Sovereign from exposing his person in a dangerous cruise, referred to recent catastrophes, and instanced the story of a Swedish Admiral who had been blown up with his ship, Peter wrote on the margin of his report, 'The *okolnitchyi* Zassiékin strangled himself with a pig's ear . . . I neither advise nor order any one to run into danger; but to accept money, and then not to give service, is a shameful action.' The idea of service owed, of *duty*, was always before him, like a landmark,—beckoning him to climb the steep and rugged slope of virile virtue, and heroic sacrifice. But his progress towards the summit was always slow. This man, who proved himself, in the end, one of the most intrepid, the most resolute, and the most stubborn in the world, was also, at certain moments, one of the most easily discouraged, and, on some critical occasions, one of the most chicken-hearted. Napoleon,—another great man, compact of nerves,—was subject, in moments of failure, to the same sudden and passing fits of weakness, and the same quick revulsions of spirit, which brought him back, like a flash, to self-possession, and to the power of using his faculties and resources, still all aflame with excitement, and thus multiplied tenfold. But, in Peter's case, the proportions of the phenomenon were far more marked. When he heard of the defeat of his army under the walls of Narva, he disguised himself as a peasant, so as the more easily to escape from the enemy, which he fancied already on his heels. He shed floods of tears, and fell into such a prostrate condition, that no one dared mention military matters to him. He was ready to submit to any conditions of peace, even the most humiliating.¹ Two years later, he was before Noteburg, a paltry town to which he had laid siege with his whole army. An assault, led by himself in person, not being so successful, at the outset, as he

¹ Vockerodt, who describes this scene, may have exaggerated, but the multiplicity of analogous traits in existence would appear to me conclusive in his favour.

had hoped, he hastily gave orders to retreat. 'Tell the Tsar,' replied Michael Galitzin, a Lieutenant-Colonel in command of a detachment of the *Siemionovski*, 'that at this moment I belong to Peter no longer, but to God!' According to some other witnesses, the Tsar's order was never delivered; but with it or without it, and, it may even be, without having dropped the heroic sentence enshrined in legend, Galitzin continued the attack, and carried the place.¹

To a much later date, and even after Poltava, Peter was unchanged, in this respect. The occurrence on the Pruth, to which I shall later have to refer, proves it. He was an almost paradoxical mixture of strength and weakness, in which the conflict of contradictory constituent elements may be clearly traced. Unflinching in his attachment to the great lines of a life and work, which, for unity and consistency, form one of the marvels of history, he was inconstancy and versatility personified, in all matters of detail. His ideas and resolutions, like his temper, changed suddenly, like a gust of wind. He was essentially a man of impulse. During his French journey, in 1717, a chorus of complaint rose from all those who had dealings with him, concerning his perpetual change of plans. No one ever knew what he might take it into his head to do on the morrow, or even within the next hour,—whither he might choose to go,—and how to travel. Nowhere could the length of his stay be reckoned on, never could the programme be laid out in advance, even for a single day. This quality is eminently characteristic of the Slavonic race, that most composite product of different and various origins, cultures, and influences, both European and Asiatic. To these, perhaps, it partly owes that power of resistance and extraordinary *grit*, of which it has given proof in undertakings which have necessarily been of considerable duration. The frequent relaxing of the spring relieves it, and prevents its wearing out. But this mixture of suppleness and rigidity may also exist as an individual characteristic. It has been very evident in the case of some historical imitators of the great Reformer, and would almost seem destined by Providence, as a means of husbanding their strength. It rendered Peter admirable service, even in matters involving most important interests. The facility with which he would

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. pp. 197-202.

change front,—turning his back on Turkey, to face Sweden,—abandoning his projects in the Sea of Azof, to turn his mind towards the Baltic,—but throwing himself, always and everywhere, thoroughly into the matter in hand, without ever dispersing his efforts,—certainly proceeded from it. So, too, did the very great facility with which—in matters of detail—he would acknowledge a personal error of judgment, or fault in practice. When, in 1722, he revoked the Ukase by which he had introduced the Presidents of the Administrative Bodies into the Senate, which was a legislative assembly, he unaffectedly described it as ‘an ill-considered measure.’ This did not prevent him, on other occasions, from holding out against wind and tide, against all other opinions, and all extraneous influences. No man ever knew better what he wanted, and how to have it done. The inscription ‘*Facta puto quæcumque jubeo*’ which some student of Ovid placed on one of the medals struck in commemoration of the great events of this reign, was the most appropriate motto the Tsar could have chosen.

It should be noted, that in his mistakes and in his failures, it was his brain alone, always, that was at fault—feeling had nothing at all to do with it. Peter was absolutely devoid of sentiment. That weakness for Menshikof and other favourites, which so offends us, would appear to be simply the outcome of miscalculation. He had a very high opinion of the intellectual standard of certain of his collaborators. His opinion of their moral standard, in the case of every one, was of the very lowest. Menshikof was a rascal, in his eyes, but a rascal who was also a genius. In the case of the others, whose genius was not sufficient to compensate him for their peccadilloes, he could, even when they were his closest friends, prove himself very firm, and even exceedingly harsh. He coolly informed one of them, Andrew Vinnius, that he had removed him from his position at the head of the Postal Administration, because he felt convinced that he had, while occupying that post, enriched himself and cheated the State, more than was fair and reasonable. But this implied no change in his favour, ‘No favourite of mine shall lead me by the nose,’ he asserted on this occasion.¹

I have never seen any instance of such absolute insensibility of feeling. During the course of the trial of his son

¹ Letter, dated April 16, 1701, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 444.

Alexis—the incidents of which might well have moved him—he had strength, time, and inclination to give his attention both to his usual amusements, and to other State business, which demanded all his clearness of mind. A great number of Ukases relating to the preservation of the Forests, the management of the Mint, the organisation of various industrial establishments, the Customs, the *Raskol*, and Agriculture, bear dates coeval with those of some of the gloomiest episodes in that terrible judicial drama. And at the same time, none of the anniversaries which the Tsar was accustomed to celebrate, with much pomp and noise, were forgotten or neglected. Banquets, masquerades and fireworks, all pursued their course.

He had an immense fund of unalterable gaiety, and a great love of social intercourse. In certain respects, his character and temperament remained that of a child, even in his ripe age. He had all the naïve cheerfulness, the effusiveness, and the simplicity of youth. Whenever any lucky event happened to him, he could not refrain from announcing his delight to all those who, as he thought, should take an interest in it. Thus he would write fifty letters at a sitting, about a military achievement of very second-rate importance—as, for example, the taking of Stettin in 1713.¹ All his life he was easily amused. He was seen at Dresden in 1711, mounted on a hobby horse, shouting ‘Quicker! quicker!’ and laughing till he cried when one of his companions turned giddy and fell off.² At the popular rejoicings which followed the conclusion of the Peace of Nystadt, in 1720, he behaved like a schoolboy on a holiday. He pranced and gesticulated in the middle of the crowd, jumped on the tables, and sang at the top of his voice. To the last days of his life, he loved teasing and rough play, delighted in coarse pleasantries, and was always ready for a practical joke. In 1723, he caused the tocsin to be sounded in the night, turned all the inhabitants of St. Petersburg—where fires were frequent, and terrible in their results—out of their beds, and could not contain himself for joy, when, rushing half-distracted in the direction of the supposed disaster, they came upon a brazier, lighted, by his orders, in a public square, by soldiers, who laughed in their faces, and greeted them

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 543.

² *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

with shouts of 'April fool's day!' ¹ One day, when sitting at table with the Duke of Holstein, he praised the curative qualities of the waters of Olonets, which he had used for several years. The duke's minister, Bassewitz, expressed his intention of following his example. The Tsar, with a mighty blow upon the diplomat's fat round back, cried out, 'What! pour water into such a cask! Come, come!' ²

How was it then, in spite of his cheerful qualities, that he inspired more fear than affection? How was it that his death came as a relief to all around him?—the end of a painful nightmare, of a reign of terror and constraint. In the first place, on account of those habits of his, which bore the mark of the society in which he had lived since childhood, and of the occupations in which he had always found the most delight. To the roughness of a Russian *barin*, he joined all the coarseness of a Dutch sailor. Further, he was violent, and frequently hasty, just as he was often cowardly; and this arose from the same cause, the same radical vice of his moral constitution—his total lack of self-control. The power of his will was, more often than not, inferior to the impetuosity of his temperament, and that will, which always met with prompt obedience in external matters, could not, consequently perhaps, sufficiently restrain the surging tumult of his instincts and his passions. The extreme servility of those about him contributed to the development of this innate disposition. 'He has never been over polite,' writes the Saxon Minister Lefort, ³ in his Journal, in May 1721, 'but he grows more and more intolerable every day. Happy is the man who is not obliged to approach him.' ⁴ The progress of this fault was so gradual as to be almost insensible. In September 1698, at a banquet given in honour of the Emperor's Envoy, Guarient, the Tsar lost his temper with his Generalissimo, Shein, in the matter of certain army promotions, of which he disapproved. He struck the table with his naked sword, exclaiming, 'Thus I will cut the whole of thy regiment to pieces, and I will pull thine own skin over thine ears!' When Romodanovski and Zotof attempted to

¹ Bergholz, *Journal, Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 238.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xx. p. 387.

³ This Lefort must not be confounded with the favourite, who will be referred to later; the relationship between the two is somewhat disputed.

⁴ *Collected Works of the Imperial Russian Historical Society* (Sbornik), vol. iii. p. 333.

interfere, he flew at them. One had his fingers almost cut off, the other received several wounds on the head. Lefort—or, as some other witnesses declare, Menshikof—was the only person who could succeed in calming him.¹ But, only a few days later, when supping with Colonel Tchambers, he knocked that same Lefort down, and trampled on him, and when Menshikof ventured, at some entertainment, to wear his sword, while he was dancing, he boxed his ears so soundly that the favourite's nose began to bleed.² In 1703, taking offence at the remarks addressed to him, in public, by the Dutch Resident, he gave immediate proof of his displeasure, by a blow from his fist, and several more with the flat of his sword.³ No notice was taken of this outburst; the Diplomatic Corps in the Tsar's capital having long since learnt to make a virtue of necessity. The Raab family, resident in Esthonia, still preserves a cane with which Peter, enraged at not finding horses at the neighbouring posting-house, wreaked his fury on the back of the proprietor of the country-house. This gentleman, having demonstrated his innocence, was permitted to keep the cane by way of compensation.⁴ And again, Ivan Savitch Brykin, the ancestor of the celebrated archæologist Snéguiref, used to tell a story that he had *seen* the Tsar kill a servant, who had been slow about uncovering in his presence, with blows from his cane.⁵ Even in his correspondence, the Sovereign would occasionally get into a fury, and lose all self-control; as, for example, when he fell on the unfortunate competitor of Augustus II., Leszczynski, and called him 'traitor, and son of a thief,' in a letter which ran more than the ordinary risk of not being treated as confidential.⁶

IV

The drinking-bouts in which the Tsar habitually indulged had a great deal to do with the frequency of these outbreaks. 'He never passed a single day without being the worse

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 625; vol. iv. p. 211.

² Korb, pp. 84, 86.

³ Despatch from Baluze, Nov. 28, 1703, French Foreign Office.

⁴ *Russian State Papers*, vol. ii. pp. 249 and 390.

⁵ Popof, *Tatitchef and his Times* (Moscow, 1861), p. 531.

⁶ *Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 66.

for drink,' so Baron Pöllnitz affirms, in his account of the Sovereign's visit to Berlin in 1717.

On the morning of the 11th July 1705, Peter, who was paying a visit to the Monastery of the Basilian Fathers at Poloçk, paused before the statue of the illustrious martyr of the Order, the blessed Jehosaphat, who was represented with a hatchet sticking in his skull. He desired an explanation. 'Who put that holy man to death?' said he. The monks answered, 'The Schismatics.' That single word drove him beside himself. He thrust with his sword at Father Kozikowski, the Superior, and killed him. His officers threw themselves on the other monks. Three were killed outright; two others, mortally wounded, died a few days later. The monastery was sacked, the church was desecrated and used as a military store. A contemporary description sent from Poloçk to Rome, and published in the Uniate Churches there, gave various horrible and disgusting details. The Tsar was described as having called his English mastiff to worry the first victim. He was said to have ordered the breasts of certain women, whose sole crime had consisted in being present at the horrible scene and having testified their terror and emotion, to be cut off. There was a certain amount of exaggeration about this, but the facts I have already indicated are quite unshaken. A first draft of the Journal of the Swedish War, prepared by Makarof, the Tsar's Secretary, contained this laconic mention of the incident: 'Went on the 30th of June (11th July) to the Uniate Church at Poloçk, and killed six monks for having spoken of our generals as heretics.' Peter struck the entry out with his own hand, and thus strengthened the acknowledgment of the fact. On one point every description of the incident is agreed. Peter, when he went to the Basilian Church, was in a state of intoxication. He had only just quitted some nocturnal orgy.¹

He never failed indeed, once the wine had died out in him, to regret the harm done, and endeavour to repair it. His repentance was as easy as his wrath was swift. In May 1703 I find these significant lines, written by his own hand, in a billet addressed to Féodor Apraxin: 'I know not how I left you, for I was too much overwhelmed by the gifts

¹ See, on this subject, Theiner, *Monuments*, p. 412; Dom Guépin, *Vie de Josaphat* (Paris, 1874), vol. ii. p. 430; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 373.

of Bacchus; wherefore I beg you all to forgive me if I caused distress to any of you, . . . and to forget all that is past.'

He frequently drank to excess, and insisted that those who had the honour of sitting at table with him should do the same. At Moscow, and, in later years, at St. Petersburg, the complaints of the Diplomatic Body on this subject were never-ending. It was a positive danger to life. Even the very women of the Tsar's circle were subject to the common rule, and Peter would find unanswerable arguments to force them to bear him company, glass in hand. The daughter of Shafirof, his Vice-Chancellor, a baptized Jew, refused a goblet of brandy. 'Vile Hebrew spawn,' he shouted, 'I'll teach thee to obey!' and he punctuated his remarks with two hearty boxes on the ear.¹

He was always in the forefront of the revel, but so robust was his constitution, that though, in the end, his health broke down, his excesses often left him steady in body, and clear in mind, while legs were trembling, and senses reeled, in the case of every one around him. On this fact another legend has been built. This perpetual and almost systematic debauch was, we are told, an instrument of government, a means of reading the most secret thoughts of his guests, to which the great man deliberately resorted. A somewhat shady expedient, if indeed, this were true. In any other country the Sovereign who attempted such a game would have risked his authority, and his prestige. And even in Russia, the political benefit would not have outweighed the moral loss,—that degradation of the whole of society, of which local customs still bear some trace. My readers will remember the story of the toast, 'A toi! France!' proposed in the presence of Louis XV. by a guest who had been carried away by the freedom of some too familiar merrymaking. 'Gentlemen, the King is here!' answered the monarch, thus recalled to a sense of his dignity. And no more such festivities took place. But Peter allowed himself to be addressed in the second person singular, every day of his life, in a constant succession of such entertainments. If any one went too far, and it suited him to take notice of the fact, the only means of repression he would ever resort to took the shape of an enormous bumper of brandy, which the

¹ Weber's *Correspondence* (published by Herrmann, 1880), p. 173.

offender was forced to swallow at a single draught. This was perfectly certain to put an end to his pranks, for, as a general rule, it sent him under the table.¹

I should be sorry, indeed, to admit that all this shows any trace of a deep-seated idea or deliberate design. I can see nothing that would lead to such an opinion. I am, on the contrary, struck by the fact, that, especially towards the end of his reign, the more and more frequent recurrence of the prolonged and extravagant orgies in which the Sovereign so delighted did not fail to considerably prejudice the conduct of State affairs. 'The Tsar,' writes the Saxon Minister, Lefort, on the 22d of August 1724, 'has kept his room for the last six days, being ill in consequence of the debauches which took place at the Tsarskaïa-Mysa (the Tsarskoë-Sielo of the present day) on the occasion of his baptizing a church, with 3000 bottles of wine. This has delayed his journey to Kronstadt.'² In January, 1725, the negotiations for the first Franco-Russian alliance received a sudden check. The French Envoy, Campredon, much disturbed, pressed the Russian Chancellor, Ostermann, and ended by dragging from him this expressive admission: 'It is utterly impossible, at the present moment, to approach the Tsar on serious subjects; he is altogether given up to his amusements, which consist in going every day to the principal houses in the town, with a suite of 200 persons, musicians and so forth, who sing songs on every sort of subject, and amuse themselves by eating and drinking at the expense of the persons they visit.'³ Even at an earlier period, during the most active and heroic epoch in his life, Peter would make these temporary disappearances, and thus bear testimony to the faults of his early education. In December 1707, when Charles XII. was making his preparations for the decisive campaign which was to carry him into the very heart of Russia, the defensive efforts of the whole country were paralysed, because the Tsar was at Moscow amusing himself. Courier after courier did Menshikof despatch, entreating him to rejoin his army. He never even broke

¹ Scherer, vol. v. p. 28.

² Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 382.

³ Despatch, dated Jan. 9, 1725, French Foreign Office. See also, in agreement, a letter from the Dutch Resident, De Bie, to the Secretary of the States-General, Fagel, dated Dec. 3, 1717, Dutch Archives.

the seals of the packets, and went on making merry.¹ He could stop himself short in a moment, it must be allowed, and he had a genius for making up for lost time. But it can hardly be said that it was for the sake of the internal affairs of his country that he thus forgot, during many weeks, to make war against his terrible adversary.

V

Coarse tastes naturally go hand-in-hand with public-house morals. In the society of women, to which he was always partial, what Peter seems to have cared for most, was mere vulgar debauchery. And especially he loved to see his female companions drunk. Catherine herself, according to Bassewitz, was 'a first-rate toper,' and owed much of her success to that fact. On gala days, at Court, the sexes were generally separated, and Peter always reserved to himself the privilege of entering the ladies' banqueting-room, where the Tsarina presided, and where nothing that she could do to render the spectacle agreeable to the master's eye was neglected. But in more intimate gatherings, the meal was shared by both sexes, and then the close of the festivities took a character worthy of the feasts of Sardanapalus. The clergy, too, had their place in these banquets, at which they were frequently to be seen. Peter had a particular liking for sitting near these ecclesiastical dignitaries. He would mingle the most unexpected theological discussions, with his most copious libations, and would apply the regulation punishment of a huge bumper of brandy, to the errors of doctrine which he loved to detect,—whereupon, now and again, the controversialists would come to blows, to his huge delight. His favourite guests—Dutch sea-captains and merchants—were by no means the humblest of the companions with whom he would sit at table, and familiarly clink his glass. At Dresden, in 1711, at the Golden Ring, his favourite lounge was the serving-men's room, and he breakfasted with them in the courtyard.²

There was nothing delicate, nothing refined, about Peter. At Amsterdam, during his first visit there, he fell in love

¹ Essipof, *Life of Menshikof* (*Russian State Papers*, 1875), p. 52.

² *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

with Testje-Roen, a celebrated clown, who gave open-air performances, and whose silly jokes were the delight of the lowest populace, and would have carried him off with him to Russia.¹

He was a boor. In certain respects, he never, to his last day, lost any of his native savagery. But was he a cruel savage? This has been affirmed. Nothing, apparently, could be more clearly established, than his reputation for ferocity; yet, this matter should be looked into. He was frequently present in the torture-chamber—where prisoners were submitted to the question, the strappado, or the knout—and also at executions in the public squares, when all the apparatus for inflicting the most revolting torments was openly displayed. It is even believed that he did not always play the part of a mere spectator. I shall have occasion to return to this point, with reference to the terrible scenes which closed the existence of the *Streltsy*. But any discussion on this matter strikes me as idle. He may occasionally have acted the part of executioner. Why not? He was already familiar with the sailor's trade, and with the carpenter's, and he did not feel—he was not capable of feeling—any difference. He was merely the man in whose person the greatest number of functions were united, in a country where the accumulation of functions was a feature of public life. The name of the executor of his principal works in St. Petersburg, also figures on the lists of his Court Jesters!²

Did Peter, then, actually cut off men's heads? It may be. But did he find pleasure in the act? That, too, is probable;—the pleasure he found in doing anything, *the joy of action*,—but there it ends. I do not believe one word of the story told by Frederick the Great to Voltaire, about the meal during which, in presence of the King of Prussia's Envoy, Baron Von Printzen, the Tsar amused himself by decapitating twenty *Streltsy*, emptying as many glasses of brandy between each stroke, and finally inviting the Prussian to follow his example.³ Round every trait of Peter's character, and every chapter of his history, innumerable tales have thus clustered, which should be put aside *a priori*, for no other reason but that of their evident *absurdity*. As

¹ Scheltema, *Anecdotes*, p. 157.

² Siémiewski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 262.

³ Voltaire's *Works*, vol. x. p. 71.

regards the rest, they deserve careful investigation. I have already referred to my own habitual guide—an agreement of general data, which, in spite of some diversity in detail, all tend steadily, and precisely, in the same direction. Now, I can discover nothing, in Peter's case, which would point to the authentic mark of the real wild beast—the greedy delight in inflicting suffering, the downright taste for blood. He shows no sign of anything of this kind; there is not even any appearance of an habitual condition of sanguinary fury. He is hard, rough, and unfeeling. Suffering, in his eyes, is a mere fact—like health or sickness—and has no more effect on him than these;—therefore I am ready to follow the legend so far as to believe that he pursued the men he had doomed to death, on to the very scaffold, with reproaches and invectives—that he jeered at them, even in their death-agony.¹ But inaccessible as he is to pity, he is moved, and easily moved, by scruple, when reasons of State do not seem to him to be involved. That famous axiom which has been ascribed, with so much praise, to Catherine II. 'It is better to set six guilty persons free, than to condemn one innocent man to death,' is no part of the historic legacy of that great Sovereign. Before her days, Peter had written it with his own hand, and on the page of a Military Regulation!²

Some of his contemporaries have, indeed, admitted the impossibility of explaining many of his actions, otherwise than by the pleasure he seems to find in doing disagreeable things to other people, or even by causing actual pain. Thus they quote the story of one of his favourites, Admiral Golovin, who refused to eat salad because he hated the taste of vinegar, which always made him ill. Peter immediately emptied a great flask of it down his throat, and almost choked him.³ I am disposed to believe this anecdote, because I have heard so many others of the same nature:—delicate young girls forced to drink a Grenadier's ration of brandy—decrepit old men obliged to prance about the streets, dressed up like mountebanks. These things were matters of daily occurrence all through Peter's reign. But this fact may bear a different interpretation. Peter had adopted certain

¹ Siémiewski, *Słowo i Działo*, p. 260.

² Rosenheim, *Military Legislation in Russia* (St. Petersburg, 1878), p. 155. See also Filippof, *Peter the Great's Reform, and his Penal Laws*, p. 143, etc.

³ Korb, as quoted above, p. 88.

fashions in dress, in food, and in amusement, which he judged fitting, and which, because they suited him, must, so he argued, suit everybody else. This was his fashion of understanding his autocratic functions, and his duties as a Reformer. On that he took his stand. Vinegar, looked at from this point of view, was part of the national law, and what happened to Golovin, with respect to that condiment, was repeated, in the case of others, with regard to cheese, oysters, or olive oil—the Tsar never losing an occasion of forcing them down the throats of any persons in whom he noticed a shrinking from his gastronomic novelties.¹ In the same way, having chosen to set his capital in a marsh, and to call it ‘his Paradise,’ he insisted that every one else should build houses in the city, and delight, or appear to delight in it, as much as he himself.

Clearly he was not a man of very tender feeling. In January 1694, when his mother was lying seriously, and even dangerously, ill, he fretted furiously at being kept in Moscow, would not endure it, and fixed the day for his departure. At the very hour when he should have started, her death-agony began, and he lost no time about burying her. Neither must I overlook the blood-stained ghost of Alexis, and the weeping shadow of Eudoxia. But, even here, the circumstances, which, morally speaking, went so far to make up the man’s character, and certain other facts,—such as the terrible events inseparable from any revolutionary period, and the rebellious instincts of a nature which would brook no contradiction, not forgetting the uncompromising nature of his whole policy, the most personal and most self-willed that ever existed,—must be taken into account.

He adored his second son, and his correspondence with Catherine—always most affectionate, as far as she is concerned—teems with expressions proving his constant solicitude for the health and happiness of his two daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, whom he jokingly described as ‘thieves,’ because they took up his time, but whom he also calls ‘his bowels’ (*Eingeweide*). He went every day to their school-room, and looked over their lessons.

He did not shrink from entering the cell of a prisoner, one of his former favourites, and informing him that he very much regretted being obliged to have his head cut off

¹ Vockerodt, according to Herrmann, p. 19.

on the following morning. This he did to Mons, in 1724. But, so long as his friends appeared to him worthy of his friendship, he was not only affectionate, he was coaxing and caressing, even to excess.

In August 1723, at the Fête in commemoration of the creation of the Russian Navy—in presence of the 'Ancestress' (*Diédoushka*) of his fleet, the English boat found in a barn in 1688—Peter, not altogether sober, it is true, kissed the Duke of Holstein on the neck, on the forehead, on the head—having first pulled off his wig—and finally, according to Bergholz, embraced him in a yet more tender manner.¹

Even from the point of view with which we are now engaged, these peculiarities can hardly be taken to mark him as a mere imitation of an Asiatic despot. Something better he surely is, both as a Sovereign and as a private individual—something quite different, at all events, removed, in many respects, from common humanity, above it, or below it, but never, either instinctively, or intentionally, inhuman. A series of Ukases which bear his signature prove that his mind, if not his heart, was open to ideas, if not to sentiments, of a gentler kind. In one of these, he claims the title of 'Protector of Widows, of Orphans, and of the Defenceless.'² The moral centre of gravity, in the case of this great unconscious idealist, who was also (and his was not a unique case) a mighty sensualist, must be sought for on the intellectual side. In spite of the natural heat of his temperament, he succeeded, on the whole, in the majority of instances, in subordinating his sensations to that common law of which he had proclaimed himself the Chief Slave—believing that he thus acquired the right of bringing all other wills, all other intelligences and passions, without distinction, and without favour, under its rule.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 301.

² *Collected Laws*, pp. 337, 462, 777, 839, 3279, 3290, 3298, 3608.

CHAPTER II

INTELLECTUAL TRAITS AND MORAL FEATURES

- i. Mental capacity—Power and elasticity—Comparison with Napoleon I.—Slavonic *acceptivity*—Intercourse with the Quakers—Law—Curiosity and impatience for knowledge—A night spent in a museum—Incoherent and rudimentary nature of the knowledge thus acquired—Peter's diplomacy—Was he a great leader?—Lack of proportion—Mixture of gravity and puerility—Peter as surgeon and dentist—Scientific and artistic creations—Peter and the Abbé Bignon.
- ii. His clearness and perspicuity of mind—His epistolary style—The Oriental touch—Proposal to reconstruct the Colossus of Rhodes—Contradictory features—Generosity and meanness—Loyalty and roguery—Modesty and love of bragging—History and tradition—The Western spirit of chivalry, and the Byzantine influence in Russia—Joan of Arc and Queen Olga—Bayard and St. Alexander Nevski—Peter's morality—Lack of scruple and scorn for convention—Causes and results.
- iii. Strength and narrowness of insight—Intellectual short-sightedness—Absence of the psychological sense—Disinclination for abstract conception—Want of comprehension of the ideal elements of civilisation—Yet he was an idealist.
- iv. Love of disguises—Buffoonery—Moral debauch, or political intention—The Court jesters—Popular manners—The Tsar's amusements—The ugly side of these recreations—Mingling of masquerade and of real life—A jester made Keeper of the Seals—Masked senators sit in council.
- v. The mock Patriarchate—The object of its establishment—Pope or Patriarch?—Did Peter intend to cast ridicule on his clergy?—Origin and development of the institution—The mock Pope and his conclave—Grotesque ceremonies and processions—Father Caillaud's habit—The marriage of the Knes-papa—The Princess Abbess—Synthesis and explanation of the phenomenon—Local causes and foreign influences—Byzantine asceticism and Western Satanic practices—Moral compression and reaction—Originality, despotic fancy, and levelling tendencies—Peter and Ivan the Terrible—Louis XI. and Falstaff.

I

THE brain of Peter the Great was certainly a phenomenal organism. Irresistibly, both by its nature and by its force, it enforces a comparison with that of Napoleon I. We note the same power of continuous effort, without apparent wear-

ness, the same spring and flexibility, the same faculty of applying itself, at one and the same time, to an indefinite number of subjects, all absolutely dissimilar and of most unequal importance, without the smallest visible scattering of the mental faculties, or any diminution of the attention devoted to each particular object. At Stockerau, near Vienna, in 1698, when the Russian Ambassadors were in conflict with the Imperial officials over the details of their solemn entry into the capital, Peter Mihaïlof, while sharing in all the discussions, which cause him not a little irritation, writes orders, to Vinnius, concerning the building of a Russian church at Pekin! In one of his letters to Admiral Apraxin, dated September 1706, I find instructions for the campaign then in course, directions as to the translation of a cargo of Latin books, and advice as to the education of a couple of puppies, with the following details of what they are to be taught :—‘ First, to retrieve ; second, to pull off their hats ; third, to present arms ; fourth, to jump over a stick ; fifth, to sit up and beg for food.’ On the 15th of November 1720, writing to Iagoujinski, whom he had sent on a mission to Vienna, he holds forth on the retrocession of Schleswig to the Duke of Holstein, mentions the picture of a pig-faced girl, brought back to Russia by Peter Alexiéievitch Tolstoï, desiring to know where the girl is, and whether it is possible to see her ; and speaks of two or three dozen bottles of good tokay, which he would like to possess, desiring to know the price and the expense of transport, before he gives the order for purchase.¹

His was a mind open to every perception, with that eminently Slav faculty, which Herzen describes under the name of *acceptivity*, carried to the extremest point of development. Until he arrived in London he had probably never heard of the Quakers, nor of their doctrine. By a mere chance, the house he inhabited was that in which the famous William Penn had lived during that critical time in his stormy existence, when he was prosecuted as a traitor, and as a conspirator. This fact sufficed to throw the Tsar into almost intimate relations with Penn himself, and his co-religionists, Thomas Story and Gilbert Mollison. He accepted their pamphlets, and listened devoutly to their

¹ *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 253 ; Golikof, vol. ii. p. 296 ; vol. viii. p. 120.

sermons. When, some nineteen years later, he arrived at Friederichstadt, in Holstein, with a body of troops who were to assist the Danes against the Swedes, his first question was as to whether there were any Quakers in the town. Their meeting-places having been pointed out to him, he duly attended their gatherings.¹ He did not understand much of Law's system, nor of finance in general, yet Law himself, his system, and his fate, interested him deeply, from the first moment when he had any knowledge of him. He corresponded with the adventurous banker, and followed his course with curious eyes—delighted at first, indulgent afterwards, but always sympathetic, even in the speculator's hour of darkest disgrace.²

The moment there is a question of seeing or learning anything, his eagerness and anxiety of mind make Napoleon appear a comparatively patient man. Arriving at Dresden one evening, after a day of travelling which had reduced all his suite to a state of utter exhaustion, he insisted, the moment he had supped, on being conducted to the *Kunst-kamera*, or museum of the town. He reached it at one o'clock in the morning, and spent the night there, feeding his curiosity by torchlight.³ And indeed, this curiosity, as has already been made evident, was as universal and as indefatigable as it was devoid of taste and of propriety. When the Tsarina, Marfa Apraxin, Féodor's widow, died, in 1715, at the age of fifty-one years, he desired to verify the truth of a general public belief, which had its foundation in the sickly constitution of the late Tsar, and the austere habits of his widow. To attain this object, he insisted on performing the autopsy of the corpse with his own hands, and satisfied himself completely, so it would appear, as to his sister-in-law's virtue.⁴

The sum of his knowledge and qualifications, thus perpetually increased, preserved, in spite of its prodigious variety, a certain incoherent and rudimentary quality. Russian was the only language he could speak fluently; his Dutch would only carry him through conversations with seafaring men and on naval subjects. In November 1721,

¹ Clarkson, *Life of William Penn* (1813), p. 253.

² *Russian State Papers* (1874), p. 1578.

³ *Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte*, vol. xi. p. 345.

⁴ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 14.

finding it necessary to hold a secret conversation with the French Envoy, Campredon, who had resided in Holland and made himself familiar with the language of that country, he was fain to have recourse to an interpreter, and made a somewhat unlucky choice.¹ He was scantily acquainted, indeed, with the usual methods of Western diplomacy. In May 1719, La Vic, the French Resident at St. Petersburg, remarked 'that he had allowed the Conferences at Aland to proceed without insisting on "the preliminary points,"' thus allowing the Swedes to mislead him by means of a most compromising sham negotiation, the only result of which was to separate him from his allies. In his foreign policy, he worked on a system peculiar to himself, or to his nation. He combined Slavonic shrewdness with Asiatic cunning. He threw foreign negotiators off their guard, by a manner peculiar to himself, by unexpected acts of familiarity or of rudeness, by sudden caresses. He would interrupt a speaker by kissing him on the brow; he would make long speeches, really intended for the gallery, of which his hearers could not understand a word, and would then dismiss them before they had time to ask for an explanation.²

He has passed, and does still pass, even in the eyes of certain military historians, for a great military leader. Certain new and happy ideas as to the duty of Reserves, the part to be played by cavalry, the principles of the mutual support to be rendered by isolated bodies of troops, simplification of military formation, and the employment of improvised fortifications, have been ascribed to him. The Battle of Poltava, so we are assured, furnishes an unique example, and one which aroused the admiration of Maurice de Saxe, of the use of redoubts in offensive warfare,—which redoubts are said to have been Peter's own invention. We are further told that he personally conducted the numerous siege operations which took place during the Northern War, and that this direct intervention on his part ensured their success.³ I am not qualified to enter into any controversy on such a subject, and I should have been disposed to bow unquestioningly before the admiring testimony of Maurice de Saxe. But a contradictory witness stops me short—the Journal of

¹ Campredon's Despatch, Dec. 1, 1721, French Foreign Office.

² De Bie, to the States General, May 3, 1712, Dutch State Papers.

³ Petrof, as already quoted, vol. ii. p. 84, etc.

the Northern War, to which I have already referred. This record, drawn up under Peter's personal superintendence, does not make him appear either a great historian or a good strategist. The descriptions of battles which I find in these pages—and there is indeed little else to be found—are deplorably scanty, as in the case of the battle of Narva, or, when they enter into detail, flagrantly inexact. I know not whether the great man was the real inventor of the redoubts which played such an important part at Poltava, but all the world knows that he contented himself, in that battle, by leading a regiment, leaving the chief command, as always, to his generals. He studied military engineering with some care, and took measures to put his new acquisitions on the Baltic shores into a due state of defence. But the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul at St. Petersburg can hardly be called a masterpiece of engineering skill; and even his greatest admirers admit that not one of the other works of this kind, commenced under his direction, has ever been completed.¹ As to the sieges, the success of which may have been ascribed to him, they appear to me to have invariably ended in an assault, all the credit for which was due to the brilliant qualities, the courage, and the discipline of the new Russian army. These qualities strike me as forming the only increase in this particular line which may be written down to the undisputed personal credit of the great creator. He did, as I shall elsewhere show, create almost every portion of that wonderful instrument by which the power and prestige of his country have been ensured. He was an unrivalled organiser, and I am even willing to admit, with some of his apologists, that he outstripped his own time—in recruiting matters, for instance—in the application of certain principles which had been proclaimed and theoretically affirmed in Western countries, long before, but which had been pushed to one side by established routine, and elbowed out of practical experience.

What prevented him from acquiring a real mastery of any particular branch of knowledge was not only his lack of a sense of proportion, but also a radical defect which, from the beginning to the end of his life, led him to joke, as it were, with serious things, and take childish matters seriously. Of this fact, his studies and pretensions, in matters of

¹ Petrof, as already quoted, vol. ii. p. 84, etc.

surgery and dentistry, are a more than sufficient proof. After the date of his return from Holland he always carried a case of surgical instruments upon his person, and never allowed an opportunity of using them to slip through his fingers. The officials connected with the St. Petersburg hospitals had orders to warn him whenever an interesting surgical case occurred. He was almost always present at the operations, and frequently wielded the surgeon's knife with his own hand. Thus one day he tapped a woman afflicted with dropsy, who died a few days later. The poor creature had done her best to defend herself, if not against the operation, at all events against the operator. He made a point of attending her funeral. A bag full of teeth, extracted by the august pupil of the travelling Amsterdam dentist, is still preserved in the Museum of Arts at St. Petersburg. One of the surest methods of paying court to the Sovereign was to claim his assistance for the extraction of a grinder. He not unfrequently pulled out a sound tooth. His valet de chambre, Poloubořarof, complained to him one day that his wife, under pretext of a bad tooth, had long refused to perform her conjugal duties. He sent for her, operated on her then and there, in spite of her tears and screams, and warned her that if she continued obdurate he would pull out every tooth in her two jaws. But it is only fair to recollect that Moscow owes him the first military hospital, built in 1706, to which he successively added a school of surgery, an anatomical collection, and a Botanical Garden, in which he himself planted a certain number of specimen trees. In that same year, too, dispensaries were established, by his care, in St. Petersburg, Kazan, Glouhof, Riga, and Revel.¹

Artistic or scientific studies and creations were far from being, in his case, simple matters of taste or natural inclination. It is a well-known fact that he possessed no artistic sense, no taste for painting, nor even for architecture. His low wooden cottage at Préobrajenskoïe, soon so sunken in the soil that he could touch the roof with his hand, amply sufficed for his own personal needs. For many years, he would not live in any other kind of house, even at St. Petersburg. Yet he held it proper to build palaces for his collaborators to dwell in. But building operations flagged at

¹ Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches*, p. 11, etc.

last. Once more he saw the necessity for setting a personal example, and so he ended by having a Winter and a Summer Palace of his own. These were a somewhat clumsy imitation of Western models—for he insisted, too, on being his own architect. The main body of the buildings clashed with the wings, and formed ungraceful angles. Further, he would have double ceilings in the rooms reserved for his own use, so that he might still fancy he was living in a wooden cabin. But the impulse had been given, and in course of time, the French architect, Leblond, retained at the heavy salary of 40,000 livres a year, succeeded in correcting past errors, and in giving the new capital that monumental and decorative appearance appropriate to its dignity. Peter took pains also, to add to the small collection of works of art made during his first stay in Holland. When he reappeared in Amsterdam in 1717, he had learnt to put on the airs of an enlightened amateur. He ended by possessing works by Rubens, Vandyck, Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Van der Werf, Lingelbach, Bergheim, Mieris, Wouvermann, Breughel, Ostade, and Van Huysen. He had a collection of sea pictures in his Summer Palace. In his country house at Peterhof there was a whole gallery of paintings. A talented engraver and draughtsman, Picard, and a curator named Gsell, of Swiss origin, formerly a picture-dealer in Holland, were engaged to look after these collections, the first ever seen in Russia.

But there was not a touch of personal interest in these matters. We may venture to doubt whether the Tsar took much pleasure in his correspondence with the Abbé Bignon, the King's librarian, and a member of the Académie des Sciences, of which Peter had become an honorary member after his stay in Paris in 1717. In 1720 he sent his librarian, —for by this time he had provided himself with a library— a German, Schuhmacher by name, to the Abbé with a manuscript, written in gold on vellum, which had been found at Siémipalatinsk, in Siberia, in the vaults of a ruined church. He desired to have the document deciphered, and to know, first of all, in what language it was written. He appears to have been greatly delighted when the Abbé, having called in the assistance of the King's regular translator, Fourmont, informed him that the mysterious language was that of the Tangouts, a very ancient Kalmuk

tribe. It was not till after his death that it occurred to two Russians whom he had sent to Peking to study Chinese, and who had remained there for sixteen years, to look more closely into this scientific process, and thus to make a discovery which somewhat compromised the reputation of the Parisian Orientalists. The manuscript was of Manchurian origin, and the text was absolutely different from that given by Fourmont.¹ But Peter died in the conviction that he had elucidated an important point in the national paleography and ethnography, and thus conscientiously performed his duty as a Sovereign.

Among the curiosities collected by him in his Museum of Art and of Natural History, contemporary writers mention some living specimens of the human race: a man with some monstrous infirmity, and children afflicted with physical malconformations.² The great man believed that such exhibitions as these might serve the cause of science.

II

His mind was clear, perspicuous, exact, going straight to its point, unhesitatingly and unswervingly—like a tool wielded by a sure hand. In this respect, his correspondence is exceedingly characteristic. He never writes long letters, like his heiress, Catherine II.—he has no time for that. He has no style, no rhetoric—he fails both in caligraphy and in spelling. His handwriting is generally as illegible as that of Napoleon. In most of his words there are letters missing. A note addressed to Menshikof begins thus:—‘*Mei herbrude in Kamamara*,’ which is intended to mean ‘Mein Herzbruder und Kamarad’ (my heart’s brother, and comrade!). Even in his signature, $\mathfrak{R}e\beta z$, he introduces a whimsical abbreviation, borrowed from the Slavonic alphabet. But he says what he has to say, well and quickly, finding the right expression, the words which best convey and sum up his thoughts, without any delay or apparent effort. He is rather fond of a joking style of composition, and the great Catherine’s peculiarity in this respect may have been a mere imitation of his. Thus, for example, he writes to Menshikof in the character of a dog of which his favourite is particularly fond. Very often he will

¹ Golikof, vol. viii. p. 84.

² *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 115.

break out into sallies, often carried much too far, both in thought and in expression; but oftener still, he is incisive and sarcastic. Vice-Admiral Cruys sent him a Report, in which he complained of his officers, and complimented the Tsar himself, saying, that Peter, 'himself an accomplished sailor, would know better than any one how indispensable discipline was in the Navy.' He replied, 'The Vice-Admiral chose his own Subordinates, he can therefore blame none but himself for their faults. On quite a recent occasion, he appeared less convinced of the qualities which he now attributes to the Sovereign. His criticisms and his commendations were doubtless made after he had been drinking. They have not a leg to stand on. *Either he must cease to include me in his list of skilful sailors, or he must no longer say white when I say black.*'¹

There is something oriental in the natural imagery and picturesqueness of his style. Referring to his alliance with Denmark, and the disappointment it had caused him, I find this reflection, written in his hand, 'Two bears in the same lair never agree.' And another, 'Our alliance is like two young horses harnessed to a carriage.'² Speaking of Poland, where the public mind is in a state of continual ferment, he writes, 'Affairs there are just like new *braha*' (a drink made of barley and millet). A man who talks idly is compared to 'a bear who talks about gelding a mare.' Even as a legislator, he makes use of this sort of language. When he creates the post of Attorney-General in the Senate, he declares his desire to prevent that body from 'playing at cards with the laws, and sorting them, according to their colours,' adding that the Attorney-General is to be 'his eye.'

Though a poor historian, from the artistic point of view, he was far from lacking the historic sense. He described events very ill, but he understood their meaning and their bearing very well indeed. Even in his letters to Catherine, which are of the most confidential kind, his comments are exceedingly correct. He evidently had the clearest comprehension of what he was doing, and of what was happening to him.

His fancy was naturally attracted by what was large, and even by what was exaggeratedly huge—a very oriental

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 272.

² 1712, and 1716, *Letters to Catherine I.* (1861 edition), pp. 29 and 49.

quality, again. In his last years he meditated a sort of reconstruction of the Colossus of Rhodes. A huge tower was to have been set astride over the strait, between Kronstadt and Kronsloot. It was to be crowned by a fortress and a lighthouse, and below it the largest vessels were to pass with ease. The foundations were actually laid in 1724.¹ He would fall into fits of feverish enthusiasm, epic or tragic, and this, with freaks of eccentricity, and stains of coarseness, which have puzzled many excellent judges. There is something Shakespearian about some of his inspirations. In 1697, when his departure for Europe was delayed by the discovery of Tsikler's plot—struck by the link existing between the criminality of the present and that of the past—he caused the corpse of Ivan Miloslavski, which had been rotting in the tomb for twelve years past, to be disinterred. The remains were taken to Préobrajenskoïé on a sledge, dragged by twelve hogs, and placed in an open coffin under the scaffold on which Tsikler and his accomplice Sokovnin were to die by inches—cut to pieces, hacked slowly limb from limb. At every knife-thrust the blood of the condemned men was to flow, in an avenging stream, on all that remained of the hated enemy, who had been snatched from his silent grave, to undergo the ghastly reprisals of his conqueror.² In 1723, another scene, less hideous, but quite as extraordinary, was enacted at Préobrajenskoïé. Peter caused his wooden cottage, which—(it had been temporarily removed)—had been replaced, by his orders, in its original position, to be burnt. In those days, and in a country, the inhabitants of which were so little removed from the nomadic form of existence, dwellings were looked upon as furniture. It was a symbolic and commemorative conflagration. Under that roof—as Peter confided to the Duke of Holstein—he had conceived the plan of his terrible duel with the Swedish monarch, now brought to a happy close; and in his joy over the peace thus restored, he desired to efface every memory of the anguish of the past. But he took it into his head to heighten the solemnity of this pacific demonstration by a display of fireworks. He kindled the half-rotten timbers of his cottage with Roman candles, and set the roof alight

¹ Golikof, vol. x. p. 425.

² Jeliaboujski's *Memoirs*, p. 112; Gordon's *Journal*, March 4, 1697; Ous-trialof, vol. iii. p. 22.

with many-coloured fires, beating the drum himself, meanwhile, from the beginning to the end of the *auto da fé*.¹

Now and again, even in a far more elevated sphere of conception and of feeling, he seems to rise without an effort, and hover with those choicest souls in history, whose flight soared highest, and whose scope was widest. In 1712, Stephen Iavorski, the Little-Russian monk whom he had brought from Kief to Moscow, and raised to a bishopric, publicly found fault with him, thundering reproaches, in one of his sermons, against husbands who forsook their wives, and men who would not fast at the appointed seasons. This was rank high treason, and a report to this effect was submitted to the Sovereign. Peter merely made this note on the margin of the document: 'First of all, face to face,—then before witnesses.'

When Iavorski made as though he would retire into a monastery, he would not hear of it; but he caused the Patriarch of Constantinople to send him a dispensation, which relieved him from the necessity of observing the Russian Lent.² A fanatic attempted, one day, to murder him, firing two pistol shots at him in his sleep. The weapon missed fire each time, and the would-be assassin, overcome with terror, woke the Tsar, and told him what had happened. 'God,' he said, 'must have sent him to give the monarch a miraculous sign of His protection,' adding, 'now kill me!' 'Nobody kills Envoys,' responded Peter calmly, and he let the fellow go.³ This anecdote may not be absolutely authentic; and it was somewhat unlike Peter, I confess, to allow such a fine opportunity for judicial proceedings—with all the paraphernalia of examination, search for accomplices, and sittings in the Torture Chamber—to escape him. He may, indeed, have allowed Iavorski, if he were the only person clearly implicated, to go free. But the adventure,—a pure invention, possibly, or at all events an arrangement of facts,—corresponds to an attitude of mind very characteristic of the Sovereign, and especially of his later manner. I frequently notice him giving himself airs of superior-mindedness, and of a scornful philosophy as regards his own person, and this under the most varied circumstances. When he returned from Warsaw, after his disastrous campaign on the

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 202.

² Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 324.

³ Golikof, vol. x. p. 176.

Pruth, he was complimented on his happy return. 'My happiness,' was his reply, 'amounts to this—that instead of having received a hundred strokes with a rod, I have only been given fifty.' Then, speaking to himself, 'I came, I saw, I conquered,' and as if correcting himself, 'hardly that! hardly that!' Niéplouief, one of his favourite pupils, arrived late for a morning appointment with the Tsar, in one of the naval workshops. The Sovereign was waiting for him. Niéplouief made his excuses. He had sat up late the night before with friends. 'Very well, I forgive thee, because thou hast told the truth; and besides'—here Peter would seem to have reverted to his own peculiarities, and applied one of the national proverbs to the incident—'is not every man the grandson of a woman?' (*Kto babié nié vnouk?*)¹

Were these methods of thought, of speech, of action natural to the Tsar? Did they really correspond to his innate qualities of mind and character? Were they not rather a deliberate *pose*, which he would occasionally cast aside, through inadvertence, caprice, or downright weariness? The idea is admissible, at all events, so frequently did he belie and contradict his own behaviour. When he made his entry into Derbent in 1723 he was heard to say, 'Alexander built this town; Peter has taken it!' On his return from his Persian campaign he caused his easy conquest to be thus described on one of the innumerable triumphal arches already erected at Moscow, even before the victory of Poltava:

'Struxerat fortis, sed fortior hanc cepit urbem.'

That day, evidently, he had quite forgotten to be modest! At the taking of Narva, in 1704, he forgot even to be generous—struck the enemy's commandant, Horn, whose only fault was that he had defended the place too bravely; and caused the corpse of his wife, who had been killed in the assault, to be cast into the water.² In 1710, at the taking of Wiborg, he granted the honours of war to the besieged, and then, when the capitulation was signed, he kept the garrison prisoners. This incident occurred again both at Derpt and

¹ Niéplouiet's *Memoirs* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 106.

² Lundblad, vol. i. p. 17; Adlerfeld, *Histoire militaire de Charles XII.* (Paris, 1741), vol. ii. p. 224.

at Riga.¹ Yet this same man, after the battle of Twaermynde (in July 1714), embraced Ehrensköld, a naval captain, and declared himself proud of having had to struggle with such an adversary. He carried out the conditions of peace signed with Sweden, in 1721, loyally enough, but the fashion in which he had opened hostilities on that occasion was a very pattern of knavery. In May 1700, returning to Moscow from Voronèje, he reproached the Swedish Resident, Knipercron, in the most friendly terms, with the alarm apparently felt by his daughter, then paying a visit to Voronèje, as to the imminence of a conflict between the two countries. He had done his best to calm her. 'Silly child,' he had said, 'how can you imagine that I would be the first to make an unjust war, and break a peace which I have sworn shall be eternal?' He embraced Knipercron before witnesses, and made him the most reassuring protestations, vowing that if the King of Poland were to seize Riga, he, Peter, would take it back, and restore it to the Swedes. At that very moment he had actually undertaken to join Augustus against Sweden. The common plan of attack was prepared, and the partition of the expected booty duly arranged. On the 8th of the following August, having heard from Oukraïntsof, his Envoy at Constantinople, that the signature of peace with the Porte, which he had been awaiting before throwing off the mask, was an accomplished fact, his troops were instantly set in motion, and marched towards Narva. At that very instant his other Envoy, Prince Hilkof, was received in audience by Charles XII., and gave him fresh assurances of his master's pacific intentions.²

The essentially practical turn of his mind not unfrequently rendered it narrow and mean. When Leibnitz proposed to him to establish magnetic observatories all over his Empire, the great savant very nearly forfeited the Tsar's good graces.³ But this did not prevent him from endeavouring to discover the strait which was later to bear the name of Behring. That was an evident commercial outlet, and therefore a desirable end to be attained. His economy amounted

¹ Polevoï, *History of Peter the Great* (St. Petersburg, 1843), vol. iii. pp. 79, 89. Compare Peter's *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. pp. 99, and 111.

² Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 369; vol. iv. Part ii. pp. 159-161; Fryxell, *History of Charles XII.*, translated by Jensen (Brunswick, 1861), vol. i. p. 78.

³ Baer, *Peters Verdienste um die Erweiterung der Geographischen Kenntnisse* (St. Petersburg, 1868), p. 56.

to absolute stinginess. He would use the mathematical instruments, which never left his person, to measure the daily consumption of the cheese served up to him; and to make amends for the shabby salary he gave his chief cook, Velten, he turned the meals to which he invited his friends into picnics, at a ducat a head.¹ His love of interfering with everybody and everything made him always willing to act as godfather, but the present he bestowed on the child's mother, when, according to the custom of the country, he kissed her cheek, never exceeded a ducat slipped below her pillow, in the case of an officer's wife, or a rouble, in that of the wife of a private soldier.² He gave thirty roubles to a pilot named Antip Timofiéief, who saved his life in a hurricane on the White Sea in 1694.³ And this was a great effort of generosity on his part.

And yet I believe he was always, and everywhere, perfectly sincere with himself, and perfectly natural, even in his most contradictory moments. He was naturally diverse in character, for reasons to which I shall have to refer again, and both his constitution and his moral education were perfectly different from those to which we are accustomed. The country which gave him birth, the race to which he belonged, the tradition from which he proceeded, must never be forgotten. Rurik, Oleg, Saint Vladimir, Sviatopolk, and Monomachus, those heroes of Russian history and legend, are great figures indeed, but they must not be confounded with the historic and legendary glories of ancient Europe. They are as different from these, in character, as they are in name. There is nothing about them of Bayard or of Francis I. Rather, with their patriarchal customs, they bear a moral resemblance to the kings of Scripture. The Russians of the present day will not, I am sure, consider this assertion either as a gratuitous insult, nor as an unjustifiable denial of their possession of the instinct of chivalry; I would just as soon deny the immense knowledge, and the admirable education, by which so many of them are distinguished. But not the less true is it that, in Peter's days, most Russians could not read, and that, no knightly lance having ever been broken in their country, they passed through the Middle Ages without any knowledge of chivalry, just as later they passed through the Renaissance period

¹ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 254.

² *Ibid.*

³ Oustrialof, vol. ii. p. 367.

without knowing much of Greek or Roman art.¹ The time and distance thus lost have indeed been successfully recouped, but the fact remains that for many years the country knew nothing of that brilliant and noble-hearted line which, from the days of Roland to those of Bayard, made the word honour synonymous, in Western Europe, with fidelity to a plighted promise; and further, that it underwent the contrary influence of the Greek Empire, from which it imbibed not only arts and sciences, habits, religion, and form of policy, but also all the Greek traditions of fraud and wily cunning. Even the legendary type of womanhood in Russia has no heroically ideal quality. She is no Joan of Arc, the inspired virgin, driving a whole people to victory through the impulse of her faith; nor is she Wanda, the gentle Polish martyr, who preferred death to espousing a foreign prince offensive to the national instinct. She is Olga, a brisk and bold-hearted lady, who hunts, and fights, and trades, triumphs over her enemies as much by cunning as by strength, and, when the Greek Emperor would marry her against her will, dismisses him in most uncompromising fashion. Peter, like Alexander Nevski,—that Ulysses among saints, as Custine called him,² a prince more wise than valiant, a model indeed of prudence, but no type of generosity and good faith,—was her true descendant; and so it came to pass that Campredon, the French Envoy, writing in 1725, concerning one of the Tsar's collaborators in his work, described him thus: 'He is far from upright, and this it is which acquired him the confidence of the late Sovereign.'³

The same apparent contradictions are noticeable in Peter's daily morals and religion. Was he a believer? It would seem almost doubtful, so off-handedly did he sometimes treat the ceremonies and ministers of a religion which, at other times, he would practise with the greatest fervour. When his sister Maria lay dying, he drove away the monks, who hastened about her to perform the traditional ceremonies, such as offering the dying woman food and drink

¹ 'The breath of chivalry never stirred the depths of Russia' (Pierling, *Russia and the Holy See*, p. 189). The chapter in this interesting work, entitled, 'The Renaissance in Moscow,' is quite conclusive, as regards my view of this subject.

² *Russia*, vol. i. p. 265.

³ May 3, 1725, *Sbornik*, vol. lviii. p. 255.

of various kinds, and inquiring plaintively whether she desired to leave life because she had not enough to eat! He would do away with all such mummers! Let it be admitted, then, that he clings to simple faith, and will have no superstitions. But yet I note his habit of writing down his dreams.¹ The English Envoy, Whitworth, in his despatch of 25th March 1712, speaks of a victorious struggle with a tiger during the Tsar's sleep, which has strengthened him in his warlike intentions.² At the same time, all propriety, morals, good or bad, civility, and decency, seem to have been a dead-letter to him. In 1723, Iajoujinski, one of the parvenus by whom he was surrounded, took it into his head to cast off his wife, with whom he had no fault to find, and by whom he had grown-up children, to marry the daughter of the Chancellor, Golovkin. As the wife on one side, and the Chancellor on the other, objected violently, Peter, who liked the plan, because it lowered the ancient aristocracy for the benefit of the new, intervened without hesitation. The woman was thrown into a convent; the father was ordered to give his consent. The Tsar declared the first marriage null and void, and undertook to bear all the expenses of the second. From the respect thus shown for family ties his regard for the rest of the moral law may easily be argued.³ At Berlin in 1718, during a visit to a collection of ancient medals and statues, his attention was attracted to the figure of a heathen divinity, one of those with which the ancient Romans frequently adorned the nuptial-chamber. He beckoned to the Tsarina, and commanded her to kiss the figure. When she appeared to object, he shouted brutally, 'Kop ab' ('Head off'), giving her to understand the risk entailed by disobedience; after which he requested the King, his host, to present him with that rare *objet d'art*, as well as with several other curiosities, including an amber cabinet, which, according to the Margrave of Baireuth, had cost an enormous sum of money. In the same way, having remarked a mummy in a Natural History Museum at Copenhagen, he manifested his intention of appropriating it. The head of the museum referred

¹ Siémiewski, *Słowo i Dielo*, p. 273, etc.

² Sbornik, vol. lxi. p. 167.

³ Campredon's Despatch, dated March 22, 1723, French Foreign Office; Dolgorouki's *Memoirs*, vol. i, p. 17.

the matter to his royal master, who answered by a polite refusal. The mummy was an exceptionally handsome and large one: there was not another like it in Germany. Peter went back to the museum, fell on that mummy, tore off its nose, mutilated it in all directions, and then took his departure, saying, 'Now you may keep it!'¹ On his departure from the Golden Ring Hotel at Dresden, in 1711, he took down with his own hands, and would have carried off, in spite of the servants' opposition, the valuable curtains sent by the Saxon Court, to decorate his apartments. At Dantzic, in 1716, finding himself inconvenienced by a draught of cold air during the performance of divine service, he stretched out his hand, without a word, snatched the wig off the head of the Burgomaster, who stood beside him, and put it on his own.²

I do not believe that Baron von Printzen was ever obliged to climb to the top of a mast to present his credentials to the Russian sovereign, who was busy in the rigging, and would not allow any interruption of that work. This anecdote—also related by the great Frederick to Voltaire³—appears to me to stamp one of its tellers—I know not which—as a downright liar. Baron von Printzen arrived in Russia in 1700. At that period, St. Petersburg—the only place where he could have met with such a reception—had no existence. There was no shipbuilding there till 1704, when von Printzen had already been succeeded in his office by Keyserling. Further, the envoy of the Elector of Brandenburg, and future King of Prussia, having started from Berlin on the 12th of October, must have arrived at his post in the very heart of a Russian winter, a season which reduces all rigging operations in the open air to a condition of forced idleness. On the other hand, Campredon's assertion that when, on the occasion of the peace negotiations with Sweden, in 1721, he asked for an audience of the Tsar, Peter came from the Admiralty to receive him, wearing a sailor's blouse, seems to me worthy of belief.

This entire absence of scruple, this disdain for the usual rules of conduct, and scorn of propriety, were accompanied

¹ Scherer, vol. ii. p. 15.

² Polevoi, vol. iv. p. 4. There are several versions of this anecdote; see Scherer, vol. ii. p. 77.

³ Voltaire's *Works*, vol. x. p. 71.

by a very deep feeling, and absolute respect, for law, for duty, and for discipline. Why and how did this come to pass? Doubtless because, in this case, we have something beyond a mere unthinking negation of the indispensable foundations of any social edifice; in spite of a large amount of caprice and whimsicality, which gave birth to many inconsistencies, a more worthy motive did exist in Peter's mind. He had undertaken to reform the existence of a whole people, whose scruples and prejudices made up a good half of their religion and morality. He regarded these, with a good deal of correctness, as the principal obstacle to any progress, and therefore, very logically, he never lost an opportunity of warring against them. When piloting his flotilla of galleys on the waters of the Don, in 1699, he noticed a Dutch sailor enjoying a fricassee of tortoises, caught in the river. He mentioned it to his Russians, and there was a general outcry of disgust. Such food appeared to them abominable and unclean. Straightway his cook had orders to serve the horrid dish at his own table, under the guise of chicken. Shein and Saltykof, who dined on it, fainted away when, by their master's order, the plumage of the bird they believed themselves to have devoured was respectfully presented to them.

Peter felt himself called to clear the national conscience of the dross left by centuries of barbarous ignorance. But he was too impetuous, too rough and coarse, personally, and, above all, too passionately eager, to perform this work with real discernment. He hit out wildly, in all directions. Thus, even while he corrected, he deprived. The mighty teacher was one of the greatest demoralisers of the human species. Modern Russia, which owes him all its greatness, owes him most of its vices also.

III

His genius, indisputable as it is, and huge as was its field of action, does not give us the impression of taking in vast spaces and mighty wholes in one swift lightning glance. It rather gives us the idea—so great is its comprehension of, and passion for, detail—of a multitude of glances, simul-

taneously fixed on a variety of objects. And, indeed, Peter's general ideas, when such become apparent to us, always strike us as being somewhat vague and inconsistent. His plans and combinations are very apt to lack accuracy and precision, and, when his gaze turns on a distant object, his sight would seem to grow confused. Intellectually speaking, he suffered from short-sight. Of this the building of St. Petersburg is sufficient proof. Here execution came before conception. The plans were left for future consideration ; and thus there came to be quarters without streets, streets without issue, and a port without water. The usual instinct of that lightning mind was to act at once—leaving reflection to a later date—without taking time to discuss projects, so long as they seemed attractive, nor weigh means, provided these lay close at hand. Peter's power of judging his collaborators, which, according to his panegyrists, amounted to a sort of divination, would seem to be open to much discussion. The means he employed, such as taking hold of the hair of the individuals he thought of selecting, lifting their heads, and gazing for an instant straight into their eyes—those summary processes which roused the admiration of even so serious an historian as Solovief¹—are only an additional proof of that superficiality which I have already pointed out, as being the essence of all his knowledge and all his aptitudes. He had not the smallest knowledge of psychology. One day he found, in the house of a schoolmaster, a servant girl, who took his fancy. He made her his mistress, until he could make her his Empress ; and, forthwith, he proposed to make the schoolmaster the founder of the national education. That is the plain story of Catherine and of Glück. The woman began by wandering from camp to camp, the prey of the officers and soldiers of her future lord ; the man, a humble pastor in a Livonian village, began by teaching the little Russians confided to his care to sing the Lutheran Psalms. The Tsar, on becoming aware of it, closed the school and dismissed the master. But the national education proceeded no further.

One day, at the launch of a new ship, a sight which always heated his imagination, Peter fell to descanting on historical philosophy. Recalling the march of civilising

¹ *Studies* (1882), p. 205.

culture in Europe, from its Greek cradle, and on through its Italian glories, he finally expressed his conviction that Russia's turn had come. 'Let us hope,' he said, 'that within a few years we shall be able to humiliate neighbouring countries by placing our own on the highest pinnacle of glory.' His conception of civilisation is here clearly betrayed—the sentiment of a manufacturer in strong competition with the factory over the way. He had too little cultivation to analyse and understand the elements of the superiority of those foreign rivals whom he envied, and desired to excel. All he saw was the exterior, and therefore he esteemed the whole below its value. His intelligence, vast and comprehensive though it was, shows, on one side, a certain quality of limitation. It is radically inaccessible to any abstract conception. Hence he was very unskilful in judging any series of events, in deducing the consequences of a particular point of departure, in tracing effects back to their causes. He was quick to seize the practical advantages of civilisation, but he never had any suspicion of the necessary premises of all civilising undertakings. He was like a man who would begin to build a house from the roof, or who would work at the foundations and summit of an edifice, at one and the same time. His being a good carpenter, or even a fair naval engineer, did not suffice to set the moral forces of his people in organic motion.

To sum it up, Peter possessed more ingenuity than actual genius. His government was the handiwork of an artisan rather than that of an artist, of an active official rather than of a statesman. He had an extraordinary gift of manipulating men and things; and his surprising dexterity in this respect, coupled with a marvellous power of assimilation, is still noticeable in almost any modern Russian, who will come from the banks of the Don, where he never saw a machine nor a factory, and, after a few weeks spent in some western industrial centre, will be perfectly informed on the latest improvements of modern machinery, and well able to apply them in his own country. But Peter had not an original idea of his own, and cared little for originality in other people. He did not even attempt to put the elements, external or internal, which he used in his attempts at political or social construction, into independent motion.

His work was a mosaic, a mere patchwork. Even this imitation of the foreigner was not, in itself, his own original invention. It had been the constant rule in Russia since the days of Boris Godunof. All he did was to substitute a torrent, a cataract, a perfect avalanche, of German, Dutch, English, French, and Italian products, for the little stream of importation which had passed from Poland and slowly filtered into the arid Russian soil. His work—I say it again—was a mechanical performance,—superficial always, and far from intelligent, sometimes,—directed solely to external ends, without a thought of internal possibilities. It had been begun with so much carelessness as to the real nature, and inner values, of the materials selected, that its end and object perforce escaped the understanding of the nation called upon to perform it. It was heterogeneous, incongruous, and ill-arranged, useless in many particulars, harmful in others: a Dutch fleet, a German army, and a Swedish Government, the morals of Versailles, and the lagoons of Amsterdam—all included in the same series of borrowed treasures. Not a perception of the ideal side of the undertaking, nothing but a perpetual bondage to the tyranny of preconceived ideas. When he was informed that the canals he had cut through the Island of St. Basil (*Vassili-Ostrof*)—the only scrap of firm ground in his new capital—were useless, and too narrow for traffic, his first thought was to hurry off to the Dutch Resident, borrow a map of Amsterdam, and compare the dimensions, compass in hand.

Yet I have said he was an idealist, and I hold to that opinion. An idealist he was, in virtue of that part of his nature which escaped from the chances and incoherence of his daily inspiration. An idealist—after his own fashion—by the general subordination of his thought, and the constant sacrifice of his own person, to an end without any material or immediate tangibility. I mean the splendid destiny to which he believed his country appointed. Not, indeed, that, in the limited range of his mental sight, and amid the passion and perpetual tumult of his career, this end ever took very precise shape. That famous Will, which has been the theme of so many ingenious politicians, was, as I shall later prove, a mere hoax, with which he had nothing to do. The far horizon towards which his course was shaped loomed up before him, uncertain and confused: like a camp, it

may be, filled with the clatter of armed men, or else a busy fruitful hive—a centre of life, at all events—industrial, intelligent, even artistic. He dreamed indeed, but with wide-open eyes ; and, with all the positiveness of his mind and nature, he ended—so great was his effort, so mighty his faith—by almost touching and possessing this phantom dream of his. He went a step farther. He would ensure the continuity of this hallucination of what was to be, that far-distant, tremendous destiny, and, like the splendid despot that he was, he drove it into the very marrow of his subjects' bones—beat it in mercilessly, with blows of sticks, and hatchet strokes. He evolved a race of eager visionaries out of a people of mere brutes. He left something better behind him than a mere legend. He left a faith, which, unlike other faiths, is spiritualised, instead of materialised, in the simple minds which have enshrined it. 'Holy Russia' of this present day—practical, brutal, and mystic, above all things, even as he was,—standing ready, like a many-headed Messiah, to regenerate Ancient Europe, even by submerging her, is Peter's child.

An idealist, yes ! A dreamer too, a great poet in active life, was this horny-handed woodcutter ! Napoleon, the soldier mathematician, with conceptions less extravagant than Peter's, with a more judicious sense of possibilities, and a more real grasp of the future, was an idealist too.

IV

One of the most sharply marked and peculiar traits in Peter's character—a character offering contrasts so strong as to endue it, from certain points of view, with an appearance of absolute deformity—is the intense and never-ceasing strain of buffoonery, which sets an harlequin's cap on that imperious brow, twists those harsh features into a merry-andrew's grin, and everywhere and always—through all the vicissitudes of a career crammed with great events and mighty actions—mingles the solemn with the grotesque, and carries face even into the region of absolute tragedy. This is betrayed very early, quite in the dawn of Peter's reign, by the disguises adopted by the young ruler, from the very

outset, for himself, and imposed, by him, on his friends and collaborators. So early as 1695, Prince Féodor Romodanovski united the title of King of Presburg with that of General. And even when writing to him on the most serious subjects, Peter never failed to address him as '*Min Her Kenich,*' and to sign himself 'Your Majesty's very obedient Slave, *Knech Piter Komondor,*' or else, '*Ir Dacheleix Kneh,*' which last formula was unintelligible to any one but himself. He lost no opportunity of expressing his resolution to shed the last drop of his blood in the service of this mock sovereign. Meanwhile he had created Zotof, his former tutor, Archbishop of Presburg, Patriarch of the banks of the Iaouza, and of the whole *Koukouï* (a name of German origin given to the quarter known as the German suburb). Tihon Nikititch Streshnief was made Pope. He was addressed as 'Most Holy Father,' and 'Your Holiness,' and all his replies, whether they were business letters or official reports, were, by order, couched in the same style. Romodanovski addressed his letters to '*Bombardier Peter Aléxiévitch,*' and closed them with a simple formula of politeness, appropriate from a sovereign to a subject. In May 1703, after the taking of Nienschanz, Peter, acting as secretary to Field-Marshal Shérémétief, drew up, with his own hands, a report to the King—in other words, to Romodanovski—informing him that the Field-Marshal had promoted him and Menshikof to be Knights of St. Andrew, 'subject to His Majesty's approbation.' And so settled was the determination to take this burlesque seriously, that it actually survived the original actors in it. In 1719, when Féodor Romodanovski died, the title and privileges of his imaginary sovereignty passed to his son Ivan, and Peter, in an autograph letter congratulating Captain Siéniavin upon a victory won at sea, assures him of the satisfaction this success will cause 'His Majesty.'¹

On the 3rd of February 1703, he writes to Menshikof—calling him 'My heart'—to inform him of the opening of a fort, built on a property he had lately bestowed on him, and christened under the name of Oranienburg—the present Ranenburg, in the Government of Riazan. The Metropolitan of Kief presided at the ceremony. This mock Metropolitan was Mussine-Pushkin, one of the real

¹ Golikof, vol. vii. p. 264.

sovereign's boon companions, and by no means one of the least debauched. A plan of the fortress, showing the names given to the bastions, was enclosed in this letter. The first bastion was baptized with brandy, the second with lemonade, the third with Rhine wine, the fourth with beer, and the fifth with hydromel. The score, or thereabouts, of persons who made up the party, amongst whom were the Prussian and Polish Envoys, Keyserling and Koenigseck, an English merchant named Stiles, and several important Russians, appended their signatures to this letter, substituting joking sobriquets for their real names. Menshikof's reply was couched in a serious strain, for the Swedes were giving him much trouble, and he was in no laughing mood; but he did not forget to express his thanks to his august friend for the honour he had done him, by getting drunk upon his property.

In 1709, when the victory of Poltava was to be celebrated at Moscow, a huge wooden palace was built on the *Tsari'sine Lougue*; Romodanovski, enthroned in the Hall of Audience, and surrounded by the principal dignitaries of the Court, summoned the leaders of the victorious army to present their reports on the incidents and happy issue of the battle. The first to advance was Shérémétief: 'By the grace of God and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty, I have overcome the Swedish army.' 'By the grace of God, and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty,' said Menshikof, in his turn, 'I have taken General Loewenhaupt and his army prisoners at Pérévolotchna.' Last of all came Peter: 'By the grace of God, and the good fortune of your Cæsarean Majesty, I and my regiment have fought and conquered at Poltava.' All three presented the mock Cæsar with the regulation reports, and retired, bowing. After which, the astounded Swedish prisoners were brought in, and marched past the throne. A banquet, presided over by this strange substitute for the Sovereign, who was seated upon a raised dais, and condescended to summon Colonel Peter Aléxié-ievitch to his own table, closed the ceremony.¹

Efforts have been made to justify these pasquinades—almost revolting, at such a moment, and in such serious circumstances—by various interpretations of their meaning. Some will have it that this was Peter's method of inculcating,

¹ Golikof, vol. xi. p. 567, etc.

by his own example, the principle of subordination which he desired to instil into his subjects. Others, that it was an attempt to destroy all memory of the *Miestnitchestvo*, by a deliberate confusing of all ranks, and every precedence. Such ideas may, indeed, have occurred to him. He always showed the deepest intuition of the true foundation of all real discipline—the sense that he who will be obeyed must know how to obey—that he who desires service must himself learn how to serve. The expressions, ‘I serve,’ ‘since I have been in the service,’ were very habitual with him; and not less evident and enduring was his constant desire to familiarise his subjects, to fill their eyes and their souls, with that great ideal, to which he sacrificed his own life, and to which everything was to be sacrificed—to which all things must bow, and, in comparison with which, all else, even the Tsar himself, was to be accounted nothing. Such a design may have existed, at the back of such scenic effects as I have just described. But the means used by Peter for the furtherance of this object, proceeded solely and directly from his whimsicality, his love of disguises, of humbug and mystification, and from a licence of imagination which no sentiment of propriety, of respect, or even of self-respect, could keep within bounds. It should not be forgotten that masquerades were at that time a great fashion in western countries, and they had long had a settled home in Russia. Ivan the Terrible delighted in them. Peter thus merely followed the prevailing custom, which his inherent proneness to exaggeration, of view and of practical action, led him to carry to so extreme a pitch, that the means he employed finally far exceeded, and even ran counter to, his original intention.

Nothing but the extreme docility of a national temperament, long since broken in to every form of despotism, saved the very idea of sovereignty from fading out of the public mind at this period. This will appear especially true when we consider that certain of the wildest and least justifiable of the sovereign’s disguises lowered human dignity, in his own person, to the most abject and shameful level. In 1698, just after his first foreign journey, he took part in a procession, in which the mock patriarch, Zotof, wearing a mitre decorated with a figure of Bacchus, led a troop of disorderly *bacchantes*, their heads adorned with bundles of

lighted tobacco instead of vine-leaves.¹ Here, of course, we have an allusion to the monopoly, lately acquired by the Marquis of Caermarthen, and, therefore, a political intention. But the manner selected for intimating this does not strike us as being any the less objectionable. In the same year, on the very day after that on which one hundred and fifty *Streltsy* had died, in horrible tortures, Peter's cheerfulness was unabated. He kept the Brandenburg Envoy, whom he had received in farewell audience, to dinner, and regaled him, at dessert, with a scene of buffoonery, during which the mock patriarch, having bestowed his benediction on all present, with two crossed pipes, gave the signal for the dances to begin. The Tsarevitch Alexis, and his sister Nathalia, watched this entertainment from behind a hanging which was pushed aside for their convenience.²

Twenty years later the same thing was going on. During the carnival of 1724, a troop of sixty or seventy individuals—gentlemen, officers, priests (including the Tsar's Confessor, Nadajinski), burghers, and common people, amongst whom one, a sailor, walked on his hands with his head down, making strange faces and wild contortions, attended the Sovereign through the streets. These people, chosen from amongst the greatest drunkards and vilest debauchees in the country, constituted a regular brotherhood, which met on fixed days, under the name of 'Council which knows no sadness' (*Bezpiétchalnyĭ sobor*), and indulged in orgies which occasionally lasted for twenty-four hours. Ladies were invited to these gatherings, and the most important officials, ministers, generals, and grave and aged men, were frequently obliged to take part in them. In January 1725, Matthew Golovin, a man of illustrious family, eighty years of age, was ordered to appear in one of these processions, dressed as a devil. He refused, and, at a word from Peter, he was seized, stripped naked, a cap with pasteboard horns was put upon his head, and he was forced to sit, for a full hour, on the frozen Neva. He caught a violent fever, of which he died.³

Not an event, during the whole course of the reign, from the Peace of Nystadt, to the wedding of a favourite dwarf, but was made the pretext for fresh doings of the kind.

¹ Korb, p. 115.

² Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

When the dwarf died, Peter ranged maskers round his coffin, even as he had already ranged them round his marriage-bed. Every dwarf in St. Petersburg thus appeared, in 1724, at the funeral of one of their number, all of them dressed in black, and following a tiny hearse, drawn by six little Spanish horses. The same year, during a masquerade which lasted a week, senators were forbidden to unmask, even in the council chamber, during the hours devoted to important business.¹

Peter had a great number of Court jesters or fools. Strahlenberg² gives a list, which contains many names possessing other claims to importance. Zotof, Tourguénief, Shanskoi, Lanin, Shahofskoï, Tarakanof, Kirsantiévitch, and Oushakof, the most admired of all. These names can be accounted for. Flogel, in his history of Court jesters,³ divides those who surrounded the Tsar into four categories. *Firstly*, fools by natural infirmity, in whom the Sovereign finds amusement. *Secondly*, fools by punishment, condemned to play the part, for having failed in wisdom, in their former functions,—this was the case of Oushakof, who, as a captain in a guard regiment, had been sent from Smolensk to Kief with important despatches, reached the town during the night, found the gates shut, and, when there was some delay about opening them, turned round, rode back to Smolensk, and complained of his discomfiture to his commanding officer. *Thirdly*, simulated fools, who shammed mental disturbance to escape death, after having been implicated in some plot—a stratagem which did not always impose upon Peter, who, however, judged the self-chosen punishment of the poor wretches sufficient. *Fourthly*, fools by lack of education. Peter, who was in the habit of sending a great number of young men abroad, examined them, when they came back, as to the information acquired. Those who did not give him satisfaction escaped severer punishment by assuming the cap and bells. In the great Tsar's time these private jesters had a certain part assigned them, and a political importance of their own. They supplemented his police force. They boldly and

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. p. 436. etc.

² *Das Nord und Oestliche Theil von Europa und Asia* (Stockholm, 1730), p. 235.

³ *Geschichte der Hofnarren* (Liegnitz, 1789), p. 409.

loudly reported the evil deeds of his ministers, at his table, relating their thefts and their embezzlements. Peter even occasionally deputed them to avenge him. On these occasions they would carefully contrive to make the guilty person drunk, would pick a quarrel with him, and then thrash him soundly.¹ Strahlenberg's list does not give the names of the two most famous members of this burlesque and pitiful legion: the Russian, Balakiref, and the Portuguese, D'Acosta, a relation, doubtless, of the celebrated convert Uriel. To this last, Peter confided the functions of director-general and organiser of the revels, and Head of the staff employed in them. In 1713 he gave him the title of Count and Han of the Samoyedes. This last promotion was made the occasion of a series of burlesque ceremonies, in which several families of real Samoyedes, brought for the purpose from the depths of Siberia, were forced to figure. Amongst them appeared one of the Empress's cooks, disguised as a Samoyede, with a huge pair of stag's horns on his head, and girt with a yellow ribbon, to which was suspended a medal, bearing the name 'Actaeon' engraved upon it. Peter occasionally associated this man with Oushakof and Balakiref, and frequently made him his favourite butt. The poor wretch had a wife, whose reputation was of the lightest, and the Tsar never failed, when he saw him before company, to lift two of his fingers, with a symbolic gesture, above his forehead.²

These forms of amusement, coarse as they seem, especially in these days, might have passed almost uncriticised. They were the natural, and, in a sense, the indispensable, rebound of an existence devoted to a toil, which, without them, would have exceeded the limit of human strength, even in the case of such an exceptionally robust nature as Peter's. The great man thus instinctively sought relief for his overstrained nerves, and, extreme as he was in all particulars, inevitably fell into the worst excesses. It might even be urged that the disgusting, cynical, or inhuman side of his behaviour was atoned for by the unconstrained gaiety and large-hearted good-humour which usually marked it. Half a century later, Christian VII. of Denmark caused a certain Count Brandt, who had been set upon on the score of his

¹ *Kourakin Papers*, vol. i. p. 73.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 56; Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 87.

conjugal misfortunes, to be tried and condemned to death, because, in his fury, he had raised his hand against the Sovereign. Peter bore the hearty blows showered upon him by Catherine's head cook, when that functionary was not in a joking humour, without a word of complaint.¹ It may be said that he should have chosen the subjects of his jests elsewhere than in the kitchen, but that was his style. He was no aristocrat. He was essentially vulgar, on the contrary—as much allied, by certain traits of rustic humour and childish gaiety, with the plebs of every country, as he was distinguished and widely separated, by the general tendency of his mind and character, from the native plebeian element. His earliest comrades, the *Koniouhy*, had made him thoroughly acquainted with the manners and habits of the Russian populace, and to that, in part, he owed his knowledge of the masses, and his gift for ruling them. I have described him during the Christmas festivities as following the practice, traditional in the lower classes, of the *Slavlénie* (*Christa slavít*, 'praising Christ')—that is, of singing the Saviour's praises before the doors of houses, and claiming the gifts usually bestowed. One day the richest merchant in Moscow, Filadief, refused to be sufficiently generous in his donation. Peter forthwith collected the inhabitants of the whole quarter before his house, and forced him to pay a ransom of one rouble for every head in the crowd.² Here a certain quality of his genius appears: his aptitude for stirring the mob by appealing to its lowest instincts.

The really dangerous side of these pleasures and relaxations resided in the deliberate confusion, kept up by Peter, of madness with reason, of mere masquerade with serious existence. These sham counts and patriarchs, these buffoons and harlequins, constantly added to their carnival dignities and functions, and mingled with them, others, which made, or should have made, them, very serious personages. Zotof was Keeper of the Seals; Ivan Golovin, who, though he had been with Peter in Holland, knew nothing of naval matters, was, for that very reason, created head of the Admiralty. The Sovereign and his friends found this a very pretty subject for jesting, but the fleet,—which, amongst themselves.

¹ Bergholz, *Buschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 87.

² Korb, p. 101.

whenever they drank Ivan Mihailovitch's health, they called his *family*,—was far from being the better for it.

No justification nor excuse can be offered for these disorders. They were the clear and evident weak point of a most superior mind,—too far removed from the common track, too completely bereft of the balance which education, tradition, and social surroundings, generally enforce, even in the most independent natures,—to be able to maintain its equilibrium in that huge space wherein it moved, and traced out its own path.

V

It will naturally be inquired whether the public and official institution of the mock Patriarchate, to which I have already referred, really was intended, as some think, to prepare the way for the suppression of the real one. I would willingly admit this, were it not for my sense of the evident dangers such an indirect course would have involved. Would not Peter have thus risked, not only the dignity of the whole clergy, but the very idea of religion? Some people have looked on this burlesque as a mere parody of the Papacy. I cannot share their opinion. I find Zotof alternately designated *Knes-papa* and *Patriarch*. And, when Peter set the mock Cæsar, Romodanovski, beside the *Knes-papa*, whose rank was it, whose title, whose function, that he sought to ridicule and roll in the mud? I am rather disposed to believe his chief desire was to divert a mind predisposed by certain hereditary germs of Eastern despotism, certain constitutional vices, and certain faults of early education, to whimsical eccentricities. I will not deny that more serious intentions may have occasionally existed, and may even have been at the root of this wild and licentious debauch of fancy. But these soon disappeared—carried away, and fairly drowned, in the muddy waves of that tumultuous stream.

This is by no means the opinion of a recent apologist, so convinced in his own opinion as to express astonishment that no one before him had become aware of the real and abiding depth of the plans and calculations thus set in

motion by the great sovereign. How is it, he wonders, that no one has perceived that this was the Tsar's manner of hiding the forces secretly prepared, and the work of destruction to which he had already doomed them, from the eyes of his enemies? The *Knes-papa* and his Conclave, so we are told, drunk, or seemingly drunk, as they may have been in the daytime, spent their nights in unrelenting toil. The correspondence of the mock Pontiff with his Deacon (the title taken by Peter himself), with all its apparent ravings, and its filthy jokes, was a mere matter of cypher. Thus, in Zotof's letter to the Tsar, dated 23rd February 1697, *Carnival*, with his companions, *Ivashka* (drunkenness) and *Ierenka*, (debauchery), against whom Peter was warned, are said to stand for cunning and servile Poland, with her allies, the Hetman of the Cossacks, and the Han of the Tartars.¹ This interpretation has not even the virtue of ingenuity. Is it likely that, in 1697, Peter or his collaborators would have taken so much pains to convince the Swedes or the Poles of the poverty of their resources? It was only too apparent, at that moment, and the optical delusion they would have desired to produce was a very different one. As for the laborious nights of such a man as Zotof, my imagination rebels at the very thought. In a despatch from the French envoy Campredon, dated 14th March 1721, I find the following words: 'The Patriarch, of whom I have spoken above, and who is here known as *Knes-papa*, is a professional drunkard, chosen by the Tsar himself, with the purpose of turning his clergy into ridicule.' This is a true description, so far, at least, as the moral identity of the personage is concerned, although the individual actually referred to was Zotof's successor. Did Peter really think of turning his own clergy into ridicule? He may, indeed, have desired to lower the Patriarchate, as being a rival authority to his own. Up till this time, the Tsar, according to immemorial custom, had always walked in the solemn Palm-Sunday procession at Moscow, leading the Patriarch's mule. Thus, from year to year, the supremacy of the ecclesiastical power, dating from the preponderating part played by the Patriarch Philaretus during the reign of the first of the Romanoffs, was formally affirmed.

¹ See Paper, by M. Ivan Nossovitch, in *Russian Antiquities* (1874), p. 735.

Peter replaced this solemn procession by the burlesque *cortège* of his *Knes-papa*, who rode on an ox, and was followed by an army of vehicles drawn by hogs, bears, and goats.¹ The political intention is here quite manifest. But it is equally clear that this intention rapidly faded, and became more and more debased, in the prolonged course of the huge and irreverent parody, which a very sensible eye-witness, Vockerodt, described as a 'mere mental and physical debauch.'² Yet this phenomenon calls for another explanation. Its depth, its extent, its duration, were all so remarkable, that I cannot accept it as the outcome of a single individual inspiration, however fanciful and licentious. And, indeed, I remark a very general tendency, during the period immediately preceding Peter's accession, to irony, to satire, and to the comic representation, or caricature, of all the important acts of life. This may be the mere rebound from the asceticism to which I have already referred, and which, as I have pointed out, had led to a denial of every outward manifestation of social existence.³ As to the form which Peter gave, or, perhaps, only contributed to give, this tendency, it may bear some relation to the excesses in which popular imagination and passion indulged, in other countries, under the action of so-called demoniac influences. My readers will recollect the orgies of the nocturnal revels and *messes noires* so common in France early in the seventeenth century, of which the mystifying performances of modern disciples of the occult arts are but a pale reflection.⁴ The analogy of causes would here seem to confirm the analogy of facts. Both in Russia and in France we have a revolt, physical and mental, against the ordinary course of life, which compressed and wounded body and spirit alike; and human beings, seeking for momentary relief, dashed at a bound beyond the pale of reality, outside the limits of law, and religion, and society. The strange thing is that Peter should have presided at these Saturnalia. But surely he—the first and willing prisoner within the iron circle of his own Ukases—sharing, as he did, the common condition, may well have felt the common need.

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 128.

² Vockerodt. See Herrmann, p. 19.

³ Zabiclin, *Lives of the Tsarinas*, p. 426.

⁴ See Michelet, *Histoire de France* (Flammarion edition), vol. xi. p. 54.

I must now proceed to facts, and these, I believe, will strike my readers as being conclusive.

The origin of the scenes of desecration in which the *Pope* or *Patriarch* Zotof and his successors played their part, dates, as I have said, from the earliest years of this reign. But its decorative accessories were successively developed. Peter, after he had created a pontiff, proceeded to appoint him cardinals and a conclave. This was the *Vsíčshoutchie-ichyi* or *Vsíčpiianieichyi Sobor*, 'the Conclave or Council of the maddest or the most drunken'—a fixed institution, almost official in its character. The Tsar worked out its organisation from year to year, inventing statutes and regulations, which he drew up with his own hand, even on the very eve of the battle of Poltava.¹ Its members consisted of the most dissolute of his boon companions, with whom,—either out of mere brutal and despotic caprice, or in the idea of debasing, so as the more easily to control them,—he associated a certain number of men of serious mind, and rigid morals. The members' first duty was to present themselves at the house of the *Knes-papa*, called the *Vaticanum*, and there offer him their homage and their thanks. Four stutterers, conducted by one of the Tsar's footmen, were spokesmen on this occasion, in the course of which the new arrivals were invested with the red robe which was to be their future official costume. Thus garbed, they entered an apartment called the Hall of the Consistory, the only furniture of which consisted of casks ranged round the walls. At the end of the room, on a pile of emblematic objects, such as barrels, bottles, and glasses, was the throne of the *Knes-papa*. One by one the cardinals defiled before him, each receiving a glass of brandy, and listening to this formula: '*Reverendissime*, open thy mouth, swallow what thou art given, and thou shalt tell us fine things.' After which, all being seated on the casks, the sitting was opened, and continued many hours, during which copious libations were mingled with low jests. The Conclave was held in a neighbouring house, to which the members went in procession, headed by the *Knes-papa*, sitting astride on a wine-butt drawn by four oxen. He was attended by mock monks—Jacobins, Franciscans, and so forth. The habit of Father Cailleau, a French Franciscan, resident in Moscow, had supplied the

¹ See Nossovitch's Paper. Compare Siémievski, *Slovo i Dielo*, p. 281.

pattern for their dresses. Peter went so far as to try to force the monk himself to take part in the procession, and only desisted in face of the energetic opposition of the French minister. He himself, dressed as a Dutch sailor, generally ordered the march of the procession. A spacious gallery, lined with narrow beds, awaited the members of the conclave; between the beds casks sawn in half were ranged, filled with food. The sham cardinals were forbidden to leave their beds before the close of the Conclave. Certain conclavists, attached to the person of each, were charged with the duty of inciting them to drink, urging them to the wildest extravagances, to the most filthy jests, and also, so we are told, to talk unreservedly. The Tsar was always present, listening, and noting things down on his tablets. The Conclave lasted three days and three nights. When there was no question of electing a new Pope, the time was employed in discussions relative to such matters as the quality of some particular brand of wine, with which one of the cardinals had found fault.

In 1714 Peter took it into his head to vary the monotony of this programme by celebrating the wedding of the *Knes-papa* Zotof, an old man of eighty-four, whose sons were distinguished officers in the army. One of these vainly besought the Tsar to spare this shame to his father's old age. The bride was a noble lady, Anna Pashkof, nearly sixty years of age. Immense preparations were made for the celebration of this extraordinary wedding. We must not forget that the Northern War, with all its dreary array of daily sacrifice and mourning, which sucked the resources of the country dry, was then in progress. Yet, four months in advance, all the lords and ladies of the Court had orders to be ready to play their part in the ceremony, and to send detailed descriptions of their chosen disguises to the Chancellor, Count Golovkin, so that there might not be more than three of any character. Twice over, on the 12th of December 1714, and the 15th of January 1715, performers and costumes were duly inspected by Peter himself. With his own hand he wrote out all the instructions and arrangements for the ceremonial, specially invented for the occasion. On the appointed day, at a signal given by a cannon, fired from the fortress of St. Petersburg, the male and female participators in the masquerade gathered—the former in

the Chancellor's house, the latter in the dwelling of the Princess-Abbess, a lady of the name of Rjevski, 'an active and compliant, but exceedingly drunken body,' as one of her contemporaries described her. She was replaced, after her death, by Princess Anastasia Galitzin, the daughter of Prince Prozorovski, a great friend of Peter's, whom he treated like his own sister, until he had her publicly whipped in the courtyard of the offices of the Secret Police at Prébrajenskoïé, she having been accused of complicity with Alexis, after having been commissioned to watch and spy upon him. She bought back the Tsar's favour by accepting the post of Princess-Abbess.¹

The procession formed up in front of the Tsar's Palace, and, crossing the frozen Neva, took its way to the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, on the opposite bank, where a priest of over ninety years of age, actually brought from Moscow for the purpose, awaited the bride and bridegroom. At its head was Romodanovski, the mock Cæsar, dressed as King David, carrying a lyre, draped in a bearskin. Four bears were harnessed to his sledge, and a fifth followed it like a footman. These creatures screamed in the most frightful manner under the blows which were rained upon them from start to finish. King David was followed by the bride and bridegroom, seated on a very high sledge, surrounded by Cupids, a stag with huge horns on the coachman's box, and a goat seated behind them. The mock Patriarch wore his pontifical robes. All the greatest people in the capital—ministers, aristocrats, and diplomatic corps,—followed the procession, some of them more than a little constrained and uncomfortable; but for that Peter did not care a jot. Prince Menshikof, Admiral Apraxin, General Bruce, and Count Vitzthum, the Envoy of Augustus II., costumed as Hamburg burgomasters, played on the hurdy-gurdy. The Russian Chancellor, the Princes James and Gregory Dolgorouki, the Princes Peter and Demetrius Galitzin, dressed as Chinamen, played on the flute. The Austrian Resident, Pleyer, the Hanoverian Minister, Weber, the Dutch Resident, De Bie, as German shepherds, blew the bagpipes. Certain gentlemen, Michael Glebof, Peter and Nikita Hitrof, had been dispensed from performing on a musical instrument on account of their age, but they had to

¹ Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 75.

put in an appearance. The Tsarevitch, garbed as a huntsman, blew his horn; Catherine, with eight of her ladies, wore Finnish costume; the old Tsarina Marfa, the widow of Tsar Féodor, appeared in Polish dress. The Princess of Ost-Friesland had an old German costume. All these ladies played the flute. Peter, dressed, as usual, as a sailor, rattled on the drum. He was surrounded by a noisy and motley crew of Venetians blowing shrill whistles; Honduras savages, who waved their lances; Poles, scraping violins; Kalmuks, tinkling the *balalaïka* (Russian guitar); Norwegian peasants, Lutheran pastors, monks; Catholic bishops with stags' horns on their heads; *Raskolniks*, whale-fishers, Armenians, Japanese, Lapps, and Tungouses. The noise of the instruments, the screams of the bears, the clang of the bells that rang out of every church tower, and the acclamations of the thousands of onlookers, rose in an infernal cacophony of sound. 'This is the Patriarch's wedding!' shouted the spectators; 'Long live the Patriarch and his wife!' The ceremony closed, as may be imagined, with a banquet, which soon became an orgy, during which a flock of trembling octogenarians acted as cupbearers. The festivities continued the next day, and lasted well into February.¹

But it would be very unbecoming on my part to omit one detail. On the very day of the wedding, Peter, still in his sailor's costume, contrived, between the masquerade and the banquet, to give an audience to Count Vitzthum, during which, after having discussed most important matters, he charged him with a letter for his master, dated that very day, and dealing with Polish affairs. He also received Bassewitz, and talked over the Duke of Holstein's business with him.² This incident, in itself worthy of all admiration, will not diminish the disgust inspired by the circumstances which surrounded it.

When Zotof died, in 1717, Peter drew up fresh regulations for the election of his successor—quite a little volume of grotesque contrivances, in which he particularly insisted on the verification of the candidate's sex, according to the custom established at Rome since the days of the

¹ Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 279-290. Letter from De Bie to the Secretary of the States-General, St. Petersburg, Feb. 1, 1715, Dutch State Papers; Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 141.

² Golikof, vol. vi. pp. 279-290.

famous Pope Joan. We must not forget that, just at that moment, he was expecting the return of his son Alexis, and was making ready to begin that terrible trial which was to cast such a painful shadow over the last years of his life. No symptom of that shadow was apparent as yet. The new candidate was called Peter Ivanovitch Boutourlin. He had hitherto borne the title of Archbishop of St. Petersburg 'in the diocese of drunkards, gluttons, and madmen.' He was a member of one of the most illustrious families in the country. This time Peter kept the part of Subdeacon to the Conclave for himself. The members of this Conclave received their ballot balls, or rather the eggs which represented them, from the hands of the Princess-Abbess, whose breasts they kissed . . . I pass over details, which are either indescribable or uninteresting.¹ A few months later the unhappy Alexis was agonising in the Question Chamber under the torture of the whip, and yet his father sat gaily at table with the new *Knes-papa*—'the Patriarch, or rather the burlesque of a Patriarch,' as Vockerodt calls him—and presided over scenes of the vilest and most disgusting debauchery.

In 1720 Peter took it into his head to marry Boutourlin to Zotof's widow; and once more we see him lavishing the strangest drolleries, obscenities, and unheard-of profanities, in all directions. A bed was set up within a pyramid, which had been built, in 1714, before the Palace of the Senate, in commemoration of a victory over the Swedes. He must needs scoff at his soldiers' victories, at the blood spilt in defence of the country, even at his own glory! The newly-married couple were put to bed dead drunk, and subjected to the grossest indignities at the hands of the populace. The next morning, the new *Knes-papa* opened his Pontificate, by giving his blessing *after the fashion of the Russian priests*, to a procession of maskers, who waited on him at his house.²

This Pontificate was of very short duration. On the 10th of September 1723, I read in one of Campredon's despatches: 'The ceremony of the installation of the new Patriarch will take place at Moscow; the Conclave will be held in a small

Siémievski, *Slovo i Dielo*, p. 281, etc.; Scherer, vol. ii. p. 163.

² Despatch from the French Resident, La Vie, St. Petersburg, Oct. 4, 1720, French Foreign Office; Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 127.

island near Préobrajenski, on which there is a peasants' cottage. The mock cardinals will there assemble on the appointed day; they will have to drink wine and brandy, for four-and-twenty hours, without going to sleep, and after that fine preparation, they will choose their Patriarch.'¹

There can be no two opinions concerning these shameful scenes and aberrations from decency. The only possible disagreement is as to what explanation may be given of them. I hold to that I have already indicated. Peter was the representative of a society in process of formation, into which historical premisses, and his own personal initiative, had introduced, and continued to maintain, diverse and opposing elements of fermentation—a society in which nothing stable, nothing consecrated, and, therefore, nothing sacred, existed. From the days of Ivan the Terrible, all the remarkable men in this society had been eccentrics—'Samo-doury,' according to the expressive national term—and this fact is explained by the absence of a common fund of national culture. Peter was the same. He was a huge Mastodon, and his moral proportions were all colossal and monstrous, like those of the antediluvian flora and fauna. He was full of elementary forces and instincts—the true primitive man, close and thick-growing like a virgin forest, bursting with sap, and infinitely diverse. Man, as he was before a long course of natural selection developed him into a special type of the human species—like no one else, and still full of the most incongruous resemblances, mighty, capricious, tragicomic, a kinsman of Louis XI., and own cousin to Sir John Falstaff. Very plebeian too, as I have already said—a close neighbour of those lower strata, out of which a chosen circle was slowly rising. He chose his friends and collaborators among the common herd, looked after his household like any shopkeeper, thrashed his wife like a peasant, and sought his pleasure where the lower populace generally finds it. When, to all this, we add the incessant clash, within his brain, of ideas and inspirations, which, though often contradictory in themselves, generally tended to a deliberate upheaval and a consequent universal levelling process—when we consider that he consciously possessed the most absolute power, over the men and things around him, that any human being has ever known—and

¹ French Foreign Office.

when we recollect the urgent need, that, as I have said already, must from time to time have stung him, to violently cast off the realities of existence, because, in the long-run, they grew unendurable, even to such a man as he was—this strange aspect of the great Tsar's moral character will surely be sufficiently explained.

CHAPTER III

IDEAS, PRINCIPLES AND SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

- I. Abundance of ideas—Aids to memory—These ideas mostly suggested—Peter haunted by the West—Inadequacy of certain essential notions—Justice, religion, morality—Intellectual incoherence—Utilitarian spirit.
- II. General conception of the Sovereign's duty—Contradictory principles mingled with it—Individual abnegation, and absorption of the common life—Introduction of the social principle into the organisation of the country, and acceptance of its extreme consequences—The first servant of the State—Peter relinquishes the wealth amassed by his predecessors—The patrimony of the Romanofs—Peter Mihailof's pay—His account book—366 roubles a year—The reverse of the medal—Whimsicality and despotism—The servant's hand raised against his master.
- III. The causes of this contradiction—Revolutionary nature of the Reform—Asiatic elements—The Régime of terror aggravated by them—Historical connection—Arbitrary Government and the Inquisition—A dilettante in Torture—Universal espionage—'The tongues'—The Secret Police and the Tribunals of the Convention—Duration of this régime, and patience of the country under it—Suited to the National habits.
- IV. A system of perpetual threats—Summary executions—The *Doubina*—The executioner's axe—Desertion—Attempts to repress it—The brand—Outlawry—None of these measures suffice—A general *sauve-qui-peut*—'Near the Tsar, near death'—Absenteeism of the great families—Parvenus—The system thus rendered still more oppressive—Favouritism—Ancestral traditions—Their share in the Reform, and their influence on its scope.

I

I HAVE already, in the course of my remarks on the intellectual gifts of the great reformer, described them in active operation,—for action was his invariable condition. It now remains for me to show them in more direct connection with the realities of life, and of practical government.

Peter's ideas came to him in shoals. Their abundance is proved by the means he employed to protect the daily product of his active brain against the weakness of his own memory. He always carried tablets with him, which he constantly drew from his pocket and covered with hasty

notes. When these were filled—and this was all too soon—he would lay hands on the first piece of paper that came handy, and would even use the smallest clear space on any document within his reach,—whether its contents bore any relation to the subject of his momentary preoccupation or not. Thus, on the margin of a report on the proposed establishment of the St. Petersburg Academy, and following certain notes of his, respecting this particular business, the following lines, also in his handwriting, appear:—‘I must send orders to Roumiantsof, in the Ukraine, to exchange all the oxen he can get in the province for sheep, and to send some one abroad to learn how to take care of that sort of animal, how they are shorn, and how the wool is prepared for use.’¹

These ideas, if we look into them closely, are no more than suggestions, coming directly from without, and but slightly modified by any internal intellectual process; and they are more remarkable for their number than for their amplitude. Peter thought, just as he looked at things, in detail, and the chief quality of his mind was a marvellous reflecting power. But the mirror of his intellect would appear to us to be broken up into too many, and too strangely disposed, facets. A certain number of the surrounding objects,—and these often the nearest ones,—escaped his perception altogether. He spent years in the near vicinity of such a man as Possoshkof, and utterly ignored the existence of that profound and original thinker. Probably the poor philosopher suffered from the fact, that he was neither a German nor a Dutchman. In vain did he send some of his writings—his treaty on poverty and wealth, a huge and astonishing political encyclopædia—to his sovereign. In vain did he even recommend himself to his notice in that domain of practical performance, which Peter so particularly appreciated. Possoshkoff was the first person to open salt-petre works in Russia. Prince Boris Galitzin gave him *fourteen* roubles for his discovery, and that was all he ever made by it. When, long after Peter’s death, people began to read his work, he was shut up in prison, and there died. No publisher touched it till half a century later—in 1799. Peter had no use for his knowledge and his talents. Yet, during his first visit to the Hague, he applied to the Secretary

¹ Stachlin, p. 170.

of the States General,¹ Fagel, to find him a man who would undertake to organise and direct his State Chancery,—another Dutch boatswain to erect another machine, and set it going! A short time later, in London, he took the advice of a Protestant ecclesiastic on the same subject. The *Apoleipomena* of Francis Lee,² show clear traces of this consultation, and some of his readers have discovered, beside a learned dissertation on the plan of Noah's Ark, the principle of those future administrative bodies, on which the working of Peter's Government was to hinge. That looking-glass of his was invariably turned westward. The Memoirs of Ostermann, unpublished as yet, are indeed said to contain this sally, ascribed to the Tsar: 'Europe is necessary to us for a few decades; after that, we will turn our back on it.'³ I have not been able to verify the quotation, but even the fact of its correctness would not convince me of the authenticity of the remark. Failing clear proof of that, I should be much more inclined to take it as the dictum of some modern Slavophile.

Action—with this man of perpetual motion—often preceded thought, or, at all events, followed immediately on it; and the number of his acts for this reason far exceeds the quantity of his ideas. Certain very essential notions he absolutely lacked, especially in matters of mere justice.—In 1715, some of his sailors burnt certain Dutch ships, which they had taken for Swedish ones. He vowed it was Sweden's business to pay the damage, because the incident had occurred near Helsingfors; and Helsingfors stood on Swedish soil. And he really believed he was within his right. He forced the Swedish Chancellor, Piper, whom he had taken prisoner at Poltava, to sign a draft for 30,000 crowns on Stockholm, and, when the Swedish Government refused to pay, he threw the Chancellor,—a sick man, over 70 years of age,—into a dungeon, where he died the following year.⁴ I have already spoken of the inconsistency and confusion of mind, betrayed in all his behaviour, as regards religious matters. The *Registers of the Confessional*, about which Catherine was later to make such a mystery to Voltaire, and the penalties for refractory persons, were all of his invention. He used to sing

¹ Scheltema, *Russia and the Low Countries*, vol. i. p. 175-183.

² London, 1752.

³ Russian Archives, 1874, p. 1579.

⁴ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xix. p. 67.

in the church choirs, and each of his victories was celebrated by a service which lasted at least five hours. The thanksgiving for the victory of Poltava lasted seven, so as to give good measure to the God of armies. Poor-boxes were placed in all the churches he usually frequented, to receive the fines he inflicted on any members of the congregation whom he caught in unseemly attitudes, talking or sleeping. And an iron collar, which the severity of the Sovereign reserved for hardened offenders, is still preserved in the Convent of St. Alexander Nevski. Such persons heard their Mass, the following Sunday, firmly fastened by the neck to one of the pillars of the sacred edifice!¹

Yet, at other moments, both his words and actions seemed to indicate a leaning towards Protestantism. He would surround himself with Calvinists and Lutherans, would hold long doctrinal discussions, in which his orthodoxy often appeared very questionable, and would listen, with apparent devotion, to sermons that reeked of heresy. An edict, published in 1706, and approved by him, granted all Protestants free exercise of their worship.

But again, Theiner has published a series of documents proving the hopes felt at Rome—both before, and after, this decision—as to a possible reunion between the two churches. The Sovereign went so far, at certain moments, as to be gracious even to the Jesuits. He began, it must be confessed, by expelling them, in 1689, and the opinion he expressed of them at Vienna, in 1698, was far from friendly. ‘The Emperor,’ he was heard to say, ‘must know those people are much richer than he is, yet during the whole of his last war with Turkey, he never forced them to send him a man, or even a copper coin.’ Notwithstanding which, only eight years later, the Jesuit Fathers had colleges, both at Moscow, St. Petersburg, and at Archangel. This went on till 1719, then, all of a sudden, they were driven out again. Why? Because of a quarrel with the Austrian Court, the natural protector of the disciples of Loyola. Peter, not finding himself able to injure the Emperor, wreaked his bad temper on the Emperor’s protégés. All his principles, whether in religion or in politics, were of a piece with this sorry performance.²

¹ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 238.

² Golikof, vol. vii. pp. 237, 431. Weber, *Last Anecdotes*, p. 348.

As regards the Jews, he would seem to have had a settled determination of a sort. He could not abide them. He would not have them in his empire at any price. And yet, I find in his inner circle a Meyer, a most undoubted Jew, who, with his brother-in-law, Lups, served the Tsar in various operations connected with army finance and supply. The contractor was to be seen, close to his employer, sitting on his right, even at the deliberations of the Senate, and treated with every respect and consideration.¹

The fact is, that in everything, and above all things, Peter was *utilitarian*, and thus it came about, that, in matters of morality, his opinions and his line of conduct generally led him into practical cynicism. He made a law whereby infanticide was punished with death, but the lawgiver was astounded to find that Charles V. had visited adultery with the same penalty. 'Had he too many subjects?'² One day, at Vichnyï-Volotchok, in the Government of Novgorod, whither he had gone to inspect some canals in course of construction, he noticed, in the crowd, a young girl, whose pretty face, and air of embarrassment, both struck him. He beckoned to her. She came at once, but all abashed, hiding her face in her hands. He said something about finding her a husband. Her young companions burst out laughing. He inquired the reason, and was told the unhappy child had gone astray, and that her lover, a German officer, had left her with a baby in her arms. No crime this, in the Tsar's eyes! Sharply he took the girl's companions to task, sent for the infant, and openly declared his pleasure at the thought that he would some day be a good soldier. He kissed the mother, gave her a handful of roubles, and promised not to lose sight of her.³ He bestowed 10,000 ducats, and an order for banishment, on Tolstoï, the President of the commercial department of his Government, to help him to get rid of an Italian courtesan; but, that the money might not be altogether wasted, he contrived a secret negotiation at Vienna and at Rome, in which the fair lady was expected to act as a decoy.⁴

¹ Staehlin, p. 333.

² *Ibid.*

³ Staehlin, p. 233.

⁴ Campredon's Despatches, 17th Aug. 1722 (French Foreign Office).

II

Peter had, as I have endeavoured to show, a general conception of his duties, of the part he had to play, and of the rights it conferred on him. Yet, unconsciously, he mingled two principles, which—though he neither knew it nor cared—were in radical contradiction to each other. Starting from his own absolute individual sacrifice on the altar of the common interest, he arrived at the complete absorption of the whole community into his own all-engrossing individuality. Louis XIV.'s pretensions were nothing to his. He not only claimed that the Sovereign was the State, but that the whole life of the nation, past, present, and future, was identical with his own. He firmly believed that the intellectual and economic renewal—over which he did indeed preside, but which certainly proceeded, in part, from causes anterior to, and independent of, his action—was his personal work, his creation, his chattel, devoid of any reason for, or possibility of, existence, apart from him. He doubtless believed in a prolongation of this work, beyond the probable term of his own existence. All his efforts, in fact, were directed to this object. But, at the bottom of his heart, he could not conceive its existence without any participation of his. Hence his indifference in the matter of the dynastic question. It is no deluge that he foresees, after his own departure: he sees something not far removed from utter void.

His rights and duties, as he understood them, were quite a novelty to Russia. Until his time, the whole organisation of the country, including its political life, had been founded on the family idea. His father, the Tsar Alexis, had been no more than the chief of a race, and of a household; there was no society in his days, no suspicion of a reciprocity of rights and duties. This was the true Oriental conception of existence. Peter returned from the west, bringing with him a social principle, which he put forward with all his usual determination and exaggeration. He proclaimed himself the first servant of his country, and carried this idea to an extreme and fantastic point. In 1709 he wrote to Field-Marshal Shérémétief, asking him to support his application to the sovereign—that is to say, to Romodanovski—to be

promoted rear-admiral, humbly pleading his own cause, and reciting his services. In 1714 he received, and uncomplainingly accepted, the refusal of the Admiralty to his request for promotion. In 1723, when he was with the fleet at Revel, he asked for a doctor's certificate to enable him to get leave from the Lord High Admiral to sleep on shore.¹ He built himself a country house near Revel, which he christened *Catharinenthal*, and expressed astonishment, on the occasion of his first visit to it, at seeing the park quite empty. Did people think that he had set so many hands to work, and spent so much money, for no one's benefit but his own? The very next morning the town crier informed the inhabitants of Revel that the park was theirs, for their free and unrestricted use.² Immediately after his accession to the throne, he divided the considerable fortune amassed by his father and his grandfather into two parts. By means of the privileges and monopolies assigned to the sovereign, the Tsar Alexis had accumulated 10,734 *diessiatines* of cultivated land and 50,000 houses, bringing in a revenue of 200,000 roubles. Peter would keep none of this. He made all his wealth over to the State, only reserving the modest patrimony of the Romanofs, '800 *souls*' in the Government of Novgorod, for his private use.³ The only increase of income he would accept, was the usual pay of the various grades he successively held in the army and in the fleet. Receipts, signed by his hand, are still preserved, acknowledging the sum of 366 roubles, the amount of his annual pay as a chief carpenter. We also have his account book, which, though not very regularly kept, is full of curious details. 'In 1705 I earned 366 roubles for my work in the Voronèje shipyards, and 40 roubles as my captain's pay; in 1706, 156 roubles altogether, received at Kief; in 1707, received at Grodno, my colonel's pay, 460 roubles. *Expenses*—In 1707, gave at Vilna, for a monastery, 150 roubles; for stuffs bought in the same town, 39 roubles; to Anisia Kirillovna, for wearing apparel, 26 roubles; to Prince George Shahofskoï for wearing apparel, 41 roubles; to the aide-de-camp Barténief, for a very important errand, 50 roubles.'⁴ Going one day round

¹ Shornik, vol. xxv. p. 152. Golikof, vol. v. p. 257. Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 281.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 65.

³ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes* (St. Petersburg), 1885, p. 27.

⁴ Cabinet, Series I., No. 64, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 31.

the forges at Isti^ć, in the Government of Riazan, he mingled with the workmen, toiled, hammer in hand, for several hours, and then counted up his gains. He had earned 18 *altines* (copper coins of 3 kopecks each) for a corresponding number of poods of metal, on which he had spent his strength. He drew the money, and gleefully announced that as soon as he got back to Moscow he should go to the *Riady* (a sort of bazaar), and there spend it on a pair of shoes, those he had on his feet being quite worn out.¹

Something there was, at once touching and imposing, about this attitude of mind, but it had another side. To begin with, there was a good deal of whim about it, and of this the great man himself was well aware. Writing to Catherine from Helsingfors, in 1713, he says, 'On the 6th of this month the Admiral promoted me to the rank of General, whereupon I beg to congratulate the General's wife. A strange business! I was made a Rear-Admiral while I was campaigning on the Steppes, and here I am a General while I am at sea.'² Nartof's story of the Tsar's meeting with Romodanovski, on the Préobrajenskoïé Road, throws a comical light on the perpetual ambiguity which it pleased him to keep up, between the reality of his rank, and the fiction of his assumed position. Peter, seated, as usual, in his unpretending vehicle, saluted the mock sovereign, giving him his title, '*Mein gnädiger Her Kaiser*,' but forgetting to uncover. Romodanovski—in a splendid carriage, surrounded by a numerous suite, and preceded by a footman, who drove back the crowd with a heavy whip, shouting 'Stand back! hats off!'—swept by like a whirlwind, casting a furious glance on the real sovereign. An hour later he sent for Peter Mihailof, and without himself rising, or offering him a seat, roughly addressed him, inquiring what he meant by not baring his head when he saluted him. 'I did not recognise your Majesty in your Tartar dress,' was Peter's reply.³ And his Majesty did not press the matter, remembering, doubtless, a certain letter received from Peter Mihailof in consequence of a complaint made by James Bruce, and thus beginning: 'Wild beast! (*Zvier*) how long will you go on ill-treating people thus? Even here' (Peter was then in Holland) 'the wretches you have maimed come to me. Let

¹ Nartof, p. 55.

² *Correspondence*, 1861 edition, p. 34.

³ Nartof, p. 93.

there be an end to your too great intimacy with Ivashka (drunkenness)!' ¹

Another, and a much more serious, fault appears. All this false humility, and all the very real self-sacrifice which goes with it, do not prevent the relations of this man with the nation he professes to serve—and for which, indeed, he strips himself and sacrifices his whole existence—from being not only of the most exacting—that might be justified—but of the most arbitrarily despotic nature. He evidently looks on all service and sacrifice as being only the due of that towering and merciless ideal, to which every one, like himself, is bound to contribute. But, granting this, he might have been expected to make some allowance for natural lack of aptitude, for weakness, for mental inadequacy, and individual incapacity. He would not even admit the existence of such failings. The man who did not take up his appointed place, and there perform the task assigned him, was held a traitor, a relapser, and, as such, was forthwith outlawed. His property, if he had any, was sequestered,—for, being good for nothing, he was not worthy to possess anything. He was allotted a small subsistence out of his own income, the rest passed to his relations, and their mere declaration, confirmed by him, and presented to the Senate, sufficed for the transfer. If he was old enough to marry, he was forbidden to take a wife, lest his children should be like himself,—for the State had no need of such persons.² At Moscow, in December 1704, Peter himself inspected all the staff at his disposal, *Boïars, Stolniks, Dvorianin,* and other officials of every kind. Against each name he wrote with his own hand some special duty to be performed.³ If any man failed in his functions, or tried to slip out of their performance, his punishment, at the very least, was civil death.

But was the toiler free when once his task was finished? No, indeed; for the principle, in virtue of which he had been called upon to labour, claimed him altogether. His body and his soul, his thoughts, his occupations, his very pleasures belonged to the Tsar. And here we see the consequence of the confusion between the idea itself and the man who repre-

¹ *Correspondence*, Dec. 22, 1697, vol. i. p. 226. Compare Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 95.

² Ukase, dated Dec. 6, 1722. Golikof, vol. ix. p. 83.

³ Golikof, vol. ii. p. 513.

sented it. There was only one goal, and one road which led to it. The Tsar led the van, and all the rest must follow. His subjects had to do what he did, think as he thought, believe what he believed, and even take their amusements when, and as, he took his. They had to do without bridges across the Neva, because he liked crossing the river in a boat, and they had to shave their beards, because his beard grew sparsely. They must even get drunk when he got drunk; dress themselves up as cardinals, or as monkeys, if that pleased him; scoff at God and His saints, if the fancy took him; and very likely spend seven hours with him in church on the following day. Any resistance, any weakness, a mere lack of comprehension, a sign of visible effort, a symptom of disgust, or a mere failure in understanding instructions, was punished with the rod, the lash, or even the headsman's axe. The so-called servant would raise his hand upon his master, to strike, and often to kill him. In March 1704, Prince Alexis Bariatinski was whipped in the public square for having failed to bring up a few recruits for inspection. In that very same year Gregory Kamynin underwent the same punishment for having refused to share in the delights of the *Slavénie*.¹

III

These contradictions, flagrant as they are, can be explained. Peter was a violent reformer. His reform was revolutionary in character, and his government consequently partook of those conditions of existence, and of action, which have always been the inseparable concomitants of a political and social state of revolution. Again, his government, in spite of its revolutionary character, was the outcome, to a certain extent, of the former course of the national history, customs, and traditions. Of this fact Peter himself was evidently conscious. On one of the triumphal arches, raised at Moscow, on the occasion of the peace with Sweden, in 1721, the effigy of the reigning Tsar was associated with that of Ivan the Terrible. This idea emanated from the Duke of Holstein. The uncle seems to sanction the nephew's action, and thus to claim an historical connection,

¹ Jeliaboujski, *Memoirs*, pp. 214, 225.

which is, indeed, constantly confirmed by all that nephew's acts and ways of thought.¹ But, though principles might differ, practice daily gave the lie to theory. Theory, in this case, was frequently liberal in the extreme; practice almost always stood for despotism, arbitrary rule, inquisition, downright terrorism. Peter's reign was a reign of terror, as Cromwell's had been, as Robespierre's was to be, but with a special stamp of savagery of its own, derived from his Asiatic origin. In 1691, Basil Galitzin, Sophia's unfortunate political partner, was visited, even in his distant and cruel exile, by a fresh criminal prosecution. A *tcherniets* (monk) had heard the Ex-regent foretell the Tsar's approaching death. Put to the question, several times over, he still adhered to his denunciation. The proofs seemed clear enough, yet the enquiry ended by establishing that the monk had never seen the exile, and had never travelled to Iarensk, where he was interned. The whole story had been invented '*ot bezoumia*,' in a fit of frenzy, a form of mental alienation common both in Ivan's reign and in Peter's, resulting from the constant and haunting terror of the secret police, and of the torture chamber. The whole system was a part of the national tradition. The Russian proverb, 'The knout is no angel, but it teaches men to tell the truth,' contains at once its sanction and its apology. Of that fact Peter was deeply convinced. He was himself the most eager of inquisitors, delighting in the monstrous art, drawing up manuscript notes for the conduct of examinations, in which he frequently took a personal share, watching the smallest details, laying stress on every word, spying the slightest gesture. He caused a private jeweller, suspected of misappropriation, to be brought to his palace for examination. Twice over, for an hour each time, he put him to the combined tortures of the strappado and the knout, and he cheerfully related all the grisly incidents of the business to the Duke of Holstein, that very evening.² With an army of spies and detectives already at his beck and call, he would personally supplement their efforts, listening behind doors, and moving about amongst the tables during banquets, when enforced libations had heated men's heads, and loosened their tongues. He would set men to watch

¹ Staehlin, p. 217.

² Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine II.* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 154.

and supervise those officials, civil or military, who were stationed too far from him to be under his personal eye. He corresponded with these spies, and gave them very extensive powers. Field-Marshal Shérémétief, who was employed to put down a revolt in Astrakhan, was thus watched by a sergeant of the guard, Shtchépotief. Baron Von Schleinitz, the Tsar's minister in Paris, was spied on by one of his own copying clerks, named Iourine.¹ My readers will recognise the methods which sent Bellegarde, Dubois, and Delmas, to represent the convention in the camp of General Dumouriez. There is a close family resemblance between all revolutions.

A contemporary memoir writer describes a single year of the great Russian reign, as being hardly more than an enumeration of tortures and executions.² The arrest of one culprit brought about the arrest of ten, twenty, or even a hundred more. The man was first of all put to the torture, to force him to give the names of his accomplices, which names he gave, not unfrequently, at random. When his memory failed him, a sort of coarse canvas hood was put over his head, and he was led through the streets, in search of passers-by, whom he might point out to the officers of justice. Then a shout would rise, more terrible even than the call of 'fire,' and the most populous quarters would straightway become a desert. 'The tongue, the tongue,' thus the populace designated the involuntary, but generally docile instrument of this hunt for culprits, and forthwith there was a general *sauve qui peut*.³ Secret accusations were of common occurrence. A series of ukases provided for them, offering encouragement and bounties to informers, and threatening any persons knowing anything affecting the safety of the Tsar or of the empire, who hesitated to come forward, with the most terrible chastisements.⁴ The usual bounty was a sum of six roubles, but in special circumstances, it rose much higher. In 1722, ten bags, each containing 100 roubles, were laid, with a lantern beside them, in one of the Moscow squares. The contents, according to an announcement,

¹ Golikof, vol. viii. p. 406.

² Jeliaboujski, p. 26.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 274 (Editor's note).

⁴ Nov. 1st, 1705; March 2nd, 1711; Aug. 25th and Oct. 25th, 1715; Jan. 25th, Sept. 26th, and Dec. 24th, 1716; April 16th and 19th, 1717; Jan. 19th, 1718; April 16th, 1719; Feb. 9th and July 22nd, 1720; Feb. 19th, 1721; Jan. 11th, 1722.

placed on the same spot, were to belong to any person who should give information as to the author of a pamphlet against the Tsar, which had been found in one of the churches within the Kreml. The informer was further promised a gift of land, and a post in the public service. Any man who chose to pronounce the time-honoured formula, *Slovo i dielo* (literally 'word and action'), and thus to affirm his knowledge or suspicion of any act punishable by the secret police, could call for a criminal enquiry. And a very small thing, an imprudent word or even less, was held to justify suspicion. A peasant was put to the torture, and condemned to hard labour for life, for having, when in a state of intoxication, done obeisance to the Tsar 'in an unusual manner.' Another shared his fate for not having been aware that the Tsar had assumed the title of Emperor. A priest who had spoken of the sovereign's illness, and had appeared to admit the possibility of his death, was sent as a convict to Siberia. A woman found letters, traced by an unknown hand, and in an unknown tongue, on a barrel of beer in her own cellar. She was examined, could give no explanation, and died under the knout. Another woman's screams and wild convulsions disturbed the service in church. She was blind, and probably epileptic, but there was just a chance that she might have deliberately attempted to cause scandal. She was put to the question. A tipsy student who had spoken some unseemly words, was given thirty lashes with the knout; his nostrils were torn out, and he was sent to hard labour for life. I quote from official documents, from the minutes of the Russian Star Chamber,¹ and, save for the knout, I could easily have mistaken them for the minutes of the Courts presided over by Couthon, and St Just.

Peter was not, indeed, altogether devoid of any idea of clemency. He is superior, in this matter, to the ordinary type of revolutionists, and justifies the idea I have formed of his character. In 1708, I find him desiring Dolgorouki to treat those members of Boulavin's insurrection, who should willingly make their submission, with indulgence. When Dolgorouki betrays his astonishment, the Tsar insists, pointing out the necessity of distinguishing cases in which severity was indispensable from those in which it may be

¹ Siémiewski, *Głowo i Działo*, p. 51.

relaxed. But Dolgorouki's wonder proves the settled ferocity of the general tendency of Peter's rule.

This severity lasted till the end of his reign. How came it to have been so long patiently endured? Surely because it corresponded with the national customs. The whole nation was a party to it. There was no public sentiment of dislike to the person or the act of an informer. A century and a half later, this condition of mind remained almost unchanged. The most popular lines, probably, of the most popular of all the national poets, describe a Cossack's ride across the Steppes, carry an accusation to the Tsar.¹

IV

27 A special characteristic of the great Reformer's methods is his incessant use of threats. When Niéplouief, his Resident at Constantinople, was taking his final leave, he addressed him by the name of Father. The Tsar interrupted him, 'A father I will be to thee if thy conduct is good—if not, I will be thy merciless judge!'² He ordered General Repnin to prevent wood, sent from Poland, from being admitted into Riga, adding, 'If a single faggot gets through, I swear by God, thy head shall be cut off!'³ And this was no empty threat. When he wrote to his friend Vinnius, in 1696, in reference to a careless correspondent, 'Tell him I will lay what he fails to put on paper on his own back,'⁴ we feel he used no figure of speech. He would often send for officials, high and low, with whom he had to find fault, into his cabinet, and would there indicate his displeasure by a sound drubbing with his *doubina*. This, indeed, was considered a mark of favour—it being the sovereign's will that, on such occasions, fault and punishment alike should be kept secret. The only persons present were such faithful servants as Nartof, and the culprits composed their countenances as best they could, before leaving the Imperial presence, so that no sign of the occurrence might appear. As a general rule, to complete the illusion, they were commanded to dinner on the

¹ Poushkin, *Poltava*, Canto I. (Collected Works, 1887 edition), vol. iii. p. 118.

² Golikof, vol. viii. p. 132.

³ 19th May 1705, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 346.

⁴ 15th July 1696, *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 90.

same day. But occasionally the *doubina* did its work in public, in the offices of some administrative body, or even in the open street. Sometimes—and this was a great proof of the sovereign's esteem and friendship for the person so commissioned—a third party was deputed to administer the extra-judicial correction. When Captain Siéniavin took the two first Swedish vessels which fell into Russian hands, he at once became the chief favourite of the moment. Peter sent for him, and said, 'To-morrow you will dine in the house of such a person; during the meal you will pick a quarrel with him, and you will give him, in my presence, fifty blows with your stick, neither more nor less.' And the sovereign evidently considered this participation in the punishment inflicted by the Imperial will, which chastised one man and rewarded another, as reflecting considerable honour on both.¹ During the Persian campaign, another temporary favourite, Wolynski, was accosted one night, close to the Imperial tent, and, without a word of explanation, overwhelmed by a shower of blows. All at once, the Tsar held his hand. The darkness and a chance resemblance had misled him; there had been a miscarriage of justice. All he vouchsafed was coolly to remark, 'No matter! Thou art sure one day to deserve what I have given thee now; thou wilt only have to remind me, then, that the debt is paid.' And the opportunity was not long in coming.²

The Tsar's irascibility, and habitual fits of rage, certainly had something to do with these summary chastisements, but they were also the outcome of a certain deliberate system. Coming one day, unexpectedly, into a naval captain's cabin, Peter noticed an open book, which the officer vainly endeavoured to conceal. Glancing at the page, he read the following aphorism aloud: 'Russia is like a cod-fish; unless you beat it constantly, you can do nothing with it.' The Tsar smiled, and departed, saying, 'That is well! The books you read are useful books. You shall be promoted!'³

The *doubina*, as I have said, was kept for those he loved, and would fain spare; the rest had to do with a very different form of the judicial power. Uniformity of punishment is one of the chief characteristics of the criminal legislation of that period. The legislator never measured his severity by the

¹ *Memoirs* (published by Prince Galitzin, Paris, 1862), p. 133.

² Scherer, vol. iii. p. 32.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 15.

degree of culpability inherent to the crimes to be suppressed—all he thought of was his personal interest in their repression. Now as this interest, which was also the interest of the State, admitted of no gradation, neither did the punishments to be inflicted admit of any. The civil ukases and regulations were just as ferocious as those applied to military matters. Death to the soldier marching to the assault, who shall give vent to 'wild cries,' or stop to pick up a wounded man, 'even his own father.' Death to the office clerk, who should not complete a given piece of work within the time the law prescribed. Death, in almost every imaginable case.¹

Towards the end of the reign, the mutual dread and distrust had grown so universal, that life in the Tsar's immediate circle was really intolerable. He watched every one, and every one watched him, and watched his neighbour, with anxious and suspicious eyes. He concealed his smallest plans, and every one else did the same. Every business matter, whether diplomatic or other, was shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Conversation was carried on in whispers; correspondence was crammed with ambiguous terms. At a gathering in the house of Prince Dolgorouki, in February 1723, Ostermann addressed Campredon, and drew him gradually and cautiously into a window. He had a message for him, he said, for the Tsar. Campredon was all ears, when, suddenly, the expected disclosure died on the Chancellor's lips, and he would utter nothing but commonplaces. A third party had, as he fancied, drawn too near them. Then came the Tsar himself. He made the French Minister sit familiarly beside him, and lavished compliments upon him. But when the envoy tried to come to the point, he pretended not to hear him, drowned his voice with noisy exclamations, and then left him, whispering the words, 'I will give orders to have terms arranged with you.' All this fuss was over the marriage of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth with the Duke de Chartres; and the first appointment to talk the matter over, made subsequently by Ostermann with Campredon, was fixed for six o'clock in the morning, as being more likely to escape observation.²

Two years before, in the midst of the negotiations begun

¹ *Peter I.'s Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 77. Filippof, *Peter the Great and the Penal Laws*, page 283, etc.

² Campredon's Despatches, Feb. 12, 1723 (French Foreign Office).

in December 1721, to guarantee his own succession, the Tsar's interviews with Campredon had taken place in the house of Jagoujinski, and without Ostermann's knowledge. The first thing Peter then demanded, was to be enlightened on a point which was of the utmost importance to himself, but which had no relation whatsoever to the subject under discussion. He had, it would appear, during his visit to Paris, begun, and personally carried on, some other negotiation, the secret of which had been betrayed. How and by whom? Campredon was desired to send a courier to the Regent, with orders to bring back a prompt reply to these questions. The Regent, according to his wont, carefully sent the despatch on to the King of England, who, quite unmoved, wrote on the margin, 'All this convinces me that the Tsar's ministers, who are endeavouring to destroy each other, have found means to inspire him with suspicions as to some of their number, and that he is dying to find a pretext to have them impaled as soon as possible. I believe this to be the sole reason for his curiosity.' And further on he writes, 'This confirms me in my conviction that the Tsar desires to impale somebody.'¹

It is a curious fact, that all the rigorous penalties by which the implacable ruler endeavoured to enforce that universal service, which he desired to impose, on his subjects, did not succeed in preventing numerous and constantly increasing desertions. In vain did he answer these by increased severity. A regulation of the War Department, dated 1712, decreed the use of the brand for military recruits, as well as for convicts. There is even a legend connected with this matter, according to which the Tsar, in his contempt for the ancient faith, marked his soldiers with the sign of Antichrist. The brand chosen was, in fact, a cross, tattooed on the left hand; the outline was pricked into the skin, and covered with a pinch of powder which was set alight. It is worthy of remark, that one of Peter's letters, with reference to this barbarous custom, is also filled with directions, which prove the greatest solicitude for the comfort of the poor tattooed fellows, during their long marches to rejoin their depôts.¹ The practical-mindedness of the great Reformer is clearly shown in this contradictory epistle—a practical-mindedness

¹ Campredon's Despatches, Dec. 21, 1721.

² Russian Archives, 1873, pp. 2067 and 2296.

suggesting the employment of the most healthy, and therefore the most paying, methods of treating those human forces which his merciless eagerness led him, at the same time, cruelly to overtax. In civil matters, desertion, as I have already said, was punished with infamy and outlawry. 'If,' so runs a ukase, published in 1722, 'any man should rob one of these deserters, wound him, or kill him, he is not liable to punishment.' The names of the outlaws were made known to the public by means of lists hung upon gallows. The half of a deserter's goods was promised to the person who should take him alive, even if the capturer was the serf of the captured man. The other half went to the Treasury.¹ And still the desertions went on.

'Near the Tsar, near death,' says a Russian proverb. Many people preferred safety of any kind. The presence, in Peter's circle, of so many parvenus of low extraction,—Menshikof, Loukin, Troïékourof, Vladimiroy, Sklaief, Pospiélof,—is explained, independently of his personal preferences, by this general *saue qui peut* amongst the great Russian families.² And the part played by these parvenus, in the political system of which they formed an integral part, made it still more oppressive. Peter's personal government was often the hardest, the most overwhelming, the most disquieting of realities. But it not unfrequently became a mere fiction, and the change brought no improvement. In spite of his huge expenditure of labour and of energy, in spite of all his constant goings and comings, the Tsar could not see everything with his own eyes, and do everything with his own hands. During his absences with his army, when he was travelling abroad, or through the huge provinces of his own realm, power passed into the hands of Menshikof and his fellows. They used it, and more frequently abused it, after their own fashion. They were called on, periodically, to render up an account, which was not unfrequently settled by the executioner. But, living as they did, like every one else, from hand to mouth, subject to the common terror and the universal bewilderment, they took full advantage of their short hours of freedom, and thus increased the overwhelming weight and cruel pressure of the terrible Juggernaut which, sooner or later, was to crush them all. The system of favouritism which has cost Russia so much gold, so many tears,

¹ Golikof, vol. ix. p. 48.

² See Strahlenberg, p. 238, etc.

and such streams of blood, was not indeed of Peter's own creation. It was a legacy from the past, which he had not courage to repudiate, which indeed he consecrated, and the tradition of which he developed, by his own adherence to it.

He was, in some respects, even in that economic department, wherein, at first sight, he would appear to have worked such a radical change, the true heir and follower of his ancestral traditions. He did away with that system of monopolies and royal privileges which had made his predecessors the foremost merchants in their country. But, in September 1713, having to fetch a sum of money from Lubeck to St. Petersburg, he ordered the cargo of the galliot, which was to be sent on this errand, to be completed with merchandise likely to sell at a good profit in St. Petersburg.¹ This is quite in the manner of the old rulers of the Kremlin, all of them greedy of every kind of profit, and by no means scorning the very smallest. At a masquerade, during the fêtes given at Moscow in 1722, I notice the description of a bearded Neptune who played quite a special part. The Tsar's faithful subjects were invited to fasten golden ducats to the hairs of that symbolic beard, which was shortly to fall under the scissors of a barber,—none other than Peter himself. A captain of the Guard, accompanied by a clerk, followed the sea-god through the streets, and carefully registered the ducats, and the names of those who gave them.²

Even his wonderful knowledge of stage effect was connected, in a way, with the spirit of bygone times. 'Whenever the smallest advantage is gained,' observes the Dutch Resident, Van Der Hulst, in 1700, 'there is a noise made about it here, as if the whole universe had been overthrown.' During the disastrous period of the Swedish war, salvos of cannon, fireworks, extra promotion lists, and distributions of rewards, followed each other in quick succession. This was an endeavour, no doubt, and a laudable one, to mislead public opinion, so as to prevent discouragement, and also, perhaps, to put heart into the Tsar himself. But it was quite in Sophia's manner, and thoroughly Oriental in spirit. The English Envoy Whitworth, when at table with the Tsar, in 1705, was confronted with a Russian soldier, who, so he averred, had, with forty-four comrades, prisoners like him-

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 536.

² Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xx. p. 385.

self, been mutilated by the Swedes. Peter made this the text of a long sermon on the barbarity of his enemies, which, he declared, far exceeded that of the nation over which he ruled. 'Never,' he vowed, 'had any Swedish prisoner been so treated in Russia, and he would forthwith send these forty-five mutilated men into his different regiments, to warn their comrades of what they had to expect from such a treacherous enemy.' The Tsar's trick failed. Whitworth was convinced that he was being made game of, all the more as he had naturally not understood a word of the Russian soldier's story.¹ But the whole incident is thoroughly Byzantine in its nature.

This peculiarity it was, in part, which bound the Tsar so closely and so firmly to the flesh and spirit of his people, to their past and to their present,—and which has made him so permanent a factor in their very existence. Had his despotism been more logical, less influenced by the very air of the country he was sent to rule, its results would have been more short-lived.

¹ Despatch, dated 2nd May 1705. *Sbornik*, vol. xxxix. p. 79.

CHAPTER IV

PRIVATE LIFE

- I. The cottage at St. Petersburg—The pilot's dinner—Katia—Palaces and country houses—The lime tree at Strielna—Peterhof—Tsarkoie-Sielo—Revel.
- II. A day in the great man's life—His morning work—His table—Private meals and State dinners—Catherine's kitchen—What Peter ate and drank—Court luxury and domestic simplicity—Menshikof's coach and the Tsar's cabriolet—His dress—His roughness and coarse habits—Cockroaches.
- III. His amusements—Neither a sportsman nor a gambler—The water his chief delight—Winter cruises—All St Petersburg at sea—Animals—Finette and Lisette—A dog's part in politics.
- IV. Social habits—Meeting with the Margravine of Baireuth—In the German suburb—Boon companions—The Tsar's *coucher*—His pillow—His intimate circle—The *Dienshtchiks*—A favourite's marriage—Maria Matviéief.

I

IN November, 1703, the first merchant vessel, a Dutch galliot, laden with salt and wine from Friesland, entered the mouth of the Neva. The Governor of St Petersburg invited the captain to a banquet, and lavished presents on him and on his crew.¹ But before this entertainment took place, he had to accept the hospitality of the pilot, who had directed the course of his ship into harbour. He dined with him and with his wife in a modest cottage on the river bank. The fare consisted of national dishes, to which a few dainties, peculiar to his own country, had been added. At dessert, not desiring to be behindhand in politeness and generosity, the worthy captain drew from his wallet, first of all, a delicious cheese, and then a piece of linen, which he presented to the mistress of the house, with the request that he would permit him to kiss her cheek. 'Let him have his way, Katia,' said the pilot, 'the linen is of the finest, and will make you chemises

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part i. p. 252.

better than you ever dreamt of wearing in your youth.' Just at that moment the Dutchman, hearing a door open behind him, turned round, and almost fainted. A man, evidently an important personage, covered with gold embroidery, and starred with decorations, stood on the threshold, and bowed to the ground as he replied to the words of welcome addressed to him by Katia's husband.

I am half afraid this story is not true; in any case, it must have occurred some years later than 1703. Catherine does not appear, at that date, to have taken up her residence with her future husband. But, otherwise, there is an air of likelihood about it. It is very characteristic of Peter's general behaviour, and of his most intimate surroundings. He was always piloting ships, Dutch or others, receiving sea captains at his own table, and taking them in by the extreme simplicity of his manners and of his surroundings. As for the cottage on the river bank, it may still be seen at St Petersburg. It was built by Dutch workmen, on the model of those seen by the sovereign at Zaandam, in 1697. A framework of roughly-hewn tree trunks supports a low roof, on which the gay, red, Dutch tiles are replaced by wooden shingles. It contains two ground-floor rooms, of very modest proportions, separated by a narrow passage, and a kitchen, with a garret above. There are only seven windows. The exterior is painted in the Dutch style, red and green. On the apex of the roof, and at its two corners, a martial-looking decoration has been superadded—a mortar and lighted shells, all carved in wood. Within, the walls are hung with white canvass, and the door and window-frames painted with bouquets of flowers. The room on the right hand side was used as a working and a reception room. That on the left served at once for dining-room and bed-chamber.¹

This latter apartment has now been turned into a chapel, where the faithful pray, and burn candles, before an image of our Lord, below which Elizabeth caused the first words of the Lord's Prayer to be inscribed. I have never seen it otherwise than closely crowded. In the other room a few souvenirs have been collected—wooden furniture made by the great man's own hands, and "done up," alas! in 1850; a

¹ Boulhakovski, *Peter's House* (St. Petersburg, 1891). Roubane, *Topographical Description of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1799).

cupboard, two chests of drawers, a table, a bench on which he often sat outside his door to breathe the fresh air, and watch his standard floating over the ramparts of the *Petro-pavloskaia Kriépost*; utensils, and tools, which he once used.

This cottage, small and far from luxurious as it was, hardly measuring more than 18 yards by 6, was very dear to its master. He regretted it deeply, when he felt his duty was to leave it for a palace, itself a very modest one. Though he loved to build towns, he had little taste for dwelling in them. In 1708, he began to look about for a more rural residence, in the far from attractive neighbourhood of his chosen capital. His first choice fell on a retired spot on the banks of a cool and rapidly-running stream, the Strielka. Here, in one season, and not unfrequently putting his own hand to the work, he built himself a rather more comfortable dwelling, with two living-rooms and eight bed-chambers. Catherine was with him by this time, and children were beginning to come. No trace of this house remains; but we are still shown a huge lime tree, in the branches of which an arbour was built, reached by a staircase. Here Peter often sat smoking, and drinking tea out of Dutch cups, to the hissing of a samovar, also brought from Holland—for this utensil, now become so thoroughly national, and known all over Europe under its picturesque Russian name, came, like everything else, from Holland.¹ The only change made in its constitution by the Russians was the substitution of charcoal, a far cheaper mode of heating, for the original system of burning spirits of wine. Close by the lime tree, there are some majestic oaks, known as the Tsar's nurselings (*Pitrovskiié Pitomtzy*). He planted them himself. He also grew, from seed gathered by his own hands in the Hartz Mountains, the fir trees which stand at a little distance, and shade the approaches to the castle. For a castle there was, at last, in this hermitage at Strielna. When Catherine became an empress, the demands of her new rank had, perforce, to be considered, and accommodation found for her Court. But Peter soon took a sudden dislike to this country residence. It had grown too closely inhabited, and too noisy for his taste. He rid himself of it, bestowing it on his daughter, the Grand Duchess Anne,

¹ The meaning of the Russian word samovar is 'that which boils of itself.'

in 1702, and departed to Peterhof.¹ Alas! the Imperial Court and Courtiers pursued him, and a yet more sumptuous palace, with a park in the French style, and fountains, copied on those of Versailles, soon rose at Peterhof. Peter refused, at all events, to live in it himself. He had his Dutch house, which even now bears that name, close by. Though a very modest residence, it betrayed a certain amount of Flemish luxury, which removed it very far from the roughness of his earliest homes. The walls of the bedroom, a very small one, were covered with well-varnished white tiles, the floor with a flowered waxcloth, and the chimneypiece was adorned with the most magnificent specimens of Delft china. As Peter lay in bed, he could see Kronsloot, and count the vessels in his fleet. A few steps brought him to a little harbour, whence he could go by boat, down a canal, to the mouth of the Neva.

The number of the Tsar's country houses constantly increased, in consequence of his nomadic habits. He had one, a wooden building, like all the others, at Tsarkoïe-Sielo. This contained six rooms, which he occasionally shared with Catherine. According to a somewhat doubtful legend, the name of this locality, since so celebrated, is derived from that of a lady called Sarri, to whose house Peter would occasionally come, and drink a draught of milk. The Finnish name of the place, *Saari-mojs*, meaning 'high' or 'raised' village, would seem a more probable derivation. The Tsar possessed a little wooden house at Revel, before he built the ugly and heavy-looking palace which was erected towards the close of his reign. He always kept clear of palaces, as far as he found that possible. The Revel cottage, which has been preserved, contains a bedroom, a bathroom (*bania*), a dining-room, and a kitchen. In the sleeping-chamber there is a double bed of somewhat narrow proportions, with a sort of platform at the foot, on which the three *dienshtchiks* (orderlies), charged with watching over their master and mistress's slumbers, were permitted to stretch themselves.

II

Peter was never a great sleeper; he was generally up by

¹ Pylaief, *The Forgotten Past of the Neighbourhood of St. Petersburg* (St. Petersburg, 1889), p. 210.

five o'clock, and even an hour or two before, if he had pressing business—a secret council to hold, a courier to send off in a hurry, or a departing ambassador, who needed extra instructions. When the Tsar left his bed, he would walk about his room for half an hour, wearing a short dressing-gown, which exposed his bare legs, and a white cotton night-cap trimmed with green ribbons. This, no doubt, was his moment for ruminating over, and preparing, the day's work. When he was ready, his secretary, Makarof, appeared, and read him the daily reports of the different heads of departments. Then he breakfasted quickly, but heartily, and went out,—on foot, if it were fine, otherwise in a very modest cabriolet with one horse. He went to the naval dockyards, inspected the ships in course of construction, and invariably wound up by a visit to the Admiralty. Here, he would swallow a glass of brandy, and lunch off a biscuit, and then work on till one o'clock, when he dined. The kitchen of the little palace, which now stands in the Summer Garden at St. Petersburg, is next the dining-room, with a hatch through which the dishes were passed. Peter never could endure the presence of numerous servants during a meal. And this peculiarity was exceedingly Dutch. When he dined alone with his wife, as was his usual habit, they were waited upon by a single page, chosen from amongst the youngest in his service, and the Empress's most confidential waiting-woman. If the party was increased by the presence of a few guests, the chief cook, Velten, assisted by one or two *dienshtchiks*, handed the dishes. Once dessert was on the table, and a bottle placed before each guest, all the servants were ordered to withdraw.¹

These dinners were quite unceremonious; no others were ever given in the Tsar's house. All State dinners were given in Menshikof's Palace, and he it was who presided over the sumptuous repasts, consisting of as many as 200 courses, cooked by French cooks, and served on quantities of gold plate and priceless china. There were two dining-rooms in the great Summer Palace, one on the ground floor, and another on the first, each with its own kitchen beside it. Peter found time, in 1714, to give his most minute attention to the arrangement of these kitchens. He insisted on their being comparatively spacious, with tiled walls, so, he said,

¹ Staehlin, p. 109. Nartof, p. 53.

that the *haziatka* (mistress of the house) might be able to look after the oven comfortably, and even occasionally prepare dishes of her own.¹ Catherine, though no *cordon bleu*—she was supposed to have given most of her attention to the washing, in her former master's household—was not without culinary talents.

Peter himself was a very large eater. At Berlin, in October 1712, we find him supping with the Prince Royal, after having already supped with his own chancellor, Golovkin, and eating, at both tables, with the heartiest appetite. Manteuffel, the King of Poland's minister, in the description of the second of these repasts, gives great praise to the Tsar, who, he declares, 'behaved himself with perfect decorum, so far at all events, as I could see or hear.' And before offering his hand to the Queen, he even put on 'a rather dirty glove.'²

The Tsar carried his knife and spoon and fork about with him. The spoon was made of wood mounted in ivory. The knife and fork were iron, with green bone handles. He liked the simple dishes of his country, such as *shitchi* and *kasha*, preferred black bread, and never ate sweet things nor fish, which always disagreed with him. On special Fast days, he lived on fruit and farinaceous foods. During the three last years of his life, he would, from time to time, in obedience to his doctor's entreaties, give up the use, or at all events the abuse, of wine. Hence that reputation for sobriety ascribed to him by certain travellers, who visited Russia at that period,—amongst others by Lang, who accompanied the sovereign during his Persian Campaign. On these occasions, he drank *kislyic-shitchi* (sour kvass) flavoured with English small beer,³ but was never able to resist the temptation of indulging in a few glasses of brandy. But indeed these fits of abstinence never lasted long. He soon went back to his old habits, save that he avoided any mixture of alcoholic beverages, and restricted himself to drinking Medoc and Cahors. At the very end, by the advice of a Scotch doctor, Erskine, who treated him for diarrhœa, he drank Hermitage.⁴

The Tsar's stable arrangements were simple. The palace

¹ Golikof, vol. v. p. 570 (note).

² Letter to Count Flemming, *Sbornik*, vol. xx. p. 59.

³ This would appear to be a probable translation of 'baume d'Angleterre.'

⁴ Stachlin, p. 272, etc.

coach-houses only contained two coaches, with four places in each, for the use of the Empress, and the Emperor's cabriolet, with which we have already made acquaintance. Nothing more. This cabriolet was painted red, and hung very low. It was replaced, in winter, by a small sledge. Peter never got into a coach, unless he was called upon to do honour to some distinguished guest, and then he always made use of Menshikof's carriages. These were magnificent. Even when the favourite went out alone, he drove in a gilded fan-shaped coach, drawn by six horses, in crimson velvet trappings, with gold and silver ornaments; his arms crowned with a prince's coronet, adorned the panels; lacqueys and running footmen in rich liveries ran before it; pages and musicians, dressed in velvet, and covered with gold embroideries, followed it. Six gentlemen attended it at each door, and an escort of dragoons completed the procession.¹

Peter never indulged in luxury of this kind. When he was not in uniform, his dress was not unlike that of one of his own peasants. In summer he wore a kaftan, made of stout dark-coloured cloth, manufactured by Serdioukof, one of his *protégés*, a silk waistcoat, woollen stockings,—generally, as we have already seen, full of darns,—heavy, thick-soled shoes, with very high heels, and steel or copper buckles. His head-covering was a three-cornered felt hat, or a velvet cap. In winter the velvet cap was replaced by one made of sheep-skin, and the shoes by soft deer-skin boots, with the hair turned outwards. A fur lining,—sable in front, and squirrel for the back and sleeves,—was put into his kaftan. His uniform, which he never wore except on active service, was that of Colonel of the Préobrajenski regiment of the Guard. The coat was of rather coarse dark green Dutch cloth, lined with silk of the same colour (now faded to a blue shade), edged with narrow gold braid, and with large copper buttons; with it a thick doe-skin waistcoat was worn. The hat had no lace on it, the sword had an ungilt copper guard, and black sheath, and the stock was of plain black leather. Yet Peter loved fine and well-bleached linen, such as was then made in Holland, and this was the only point on which he could be induced to compromise with the deliberate and determined simplicity of his life,—a simplicity which, I am disposed to believe, was inspired by a very conscientious

¹ Pylaief, p. 379.

feeling for economy. When Catherine showed him the splendid coronation dress to which I have referred on a previous page, his first expression was one of extreme annoyance. He laid an angry hand on the silvery embroidery and shook it so violently, that several of the spangles fell to the ground. 'Look at that, Katinka,' he said, 'those will all be swept away, and they would nearly make up the pay of one of my grenadiers.'¹

He never acquired the Dutch taste for cleanliness and domestic order. At Berlin, in 1718, the Queen caused all the furniture to be removed from the house (*Mon Bijou*) intended for him, and her precaution seems to have been a wise one. He left it in such a condition that it almost had to be rebuilt. 'The desolation of Jerusalem reigned within it,' says the Margravine of Baireuth. In one detail only did an instinctive repugnance clash with the sordid habits which Oriental associations had perpetuated in Russian domestic life. He had a horror of certain parasites, which then, as now, alas! too often swarmed in Muscovite dwellings. The sight of a cockroach almost made him faint. One day an officer, with whom he had invited himself to dinner, showed him one, which, thinking to give his guest pleasure, he had nailed to the wall in a conspicuous spot. Peter rose from the table, fell on the unlucky wight, gave him a sound thrashing with his *doubin*, and made for the door.

III

His pleasures were like his tastes, not over remarkable for elegance. Unlike his ancestors,—all of them great slayers of bears and wolves, and passionate devotees of the art of falconry,—he cared nothing for sport. That imitation of war gave offence to his practical mind; not that he cared for real war, he only resigned himself to it for the sake of the profit he hoped it might bring him. Once, indeed, and once only, early in his reign, he was induced to go out coursing, but first he made his own conditions. No huntsman or whipper-in was to put in an appearance. His conditions were accepted, and he thus played his friends a sorry trick, and gave himself the satisfaction of making them feel

¹ Pylaief, p. 379.

the conventional nature of their sport. The hounds, bereft of huntsmen and whippers-in, became unmanageable, dragged at their leashes, and pulled the riders from their saddles, so that the next moment half the company was lying on the ground, and the hunt came to an end, amidst a scene of general confusion. The next day it was Peter who suggested another coursing party, and the sportsmen, most of them sorely knocked about, and some, indeed, obliged to stay in bed, who demurred to his proposition.¹

He hated cards, which he called a game for cheats. His military and naval officers were forbidden, under the severest penalties, to lose more than one rouble in an evening. Sometimes, to please the foreign sailors, whom he entertained, he would take part in a game of Dutch *gravias*. He was fond of chess, and played it well. He both smoked and snuffed. At Koppenbrügge, in 1697, he exchanged snuff-boxes with the Electress of Brandenburg. His chief pleasure—his master-passion, in fact—was boating in all its branches. At St Petersburg, when the Neva was three-parts frozen, even when the clear space of water did not measure a hundred feet square, he would go upon it in any boat he could lay his hands on. Often, in mid-winter, he would have a narrow passage cut in the ice, and there indulge in his favourite sport.² Arriving in his capital in 1706, he found the streets flooded, and two feet of water in his private rooms. He clapped his hands like a child.³ He was never really happy except on board a ship. Nothing but serious illness could keep him on shore, if he was near any port; and, indeed, he averred that, in case of illness, he was better if he went to sea. At Riga, in 1723, in the midst of a violent attack of tertian fever, which had already driven him on shore, he had his bed carried on board a frigate, fought through the illness, and always attributed his recovery to this expedient. Towards the end of his life, even for his after-dinner siesta, he stretched himself out in the bottom of a boat, which was generally provided for the purpose.

All the inhabitants of St Petersburg, either following his example, or by his care, possessed means of aquatic locomotion. All his chief officials were given a yacht, and two boats, one of twelve and another of four oars. Other officials

¹ Golikof, vol. i. p. 28.

² Pylaief, p. 379.

³ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 47

were more modestly provided, according to their *tchin*. The regulations for the use of these boats were written out by his own hand. On certain fixed days, when the Tsar's standard had been hoisted at the four corners of the city, the whole flotilla was expected, on pain of a heavy penalty, to collect in the neighbourhood of the fortress. At the signal given by a salvo of artillery, Admiral Apraxin led the way on his yacht dressed with red and white flags. The Tsar's boat followed—Peter, in his white sailor's dress, and generally accompanied by Catherine, holding the rudder. Some of the boats, which were richly decorated, had musicians on board. Thus the procession took its way to Strielna, to Peterhof, or to Oranienbaum, where a banquet awaited the party.¹

Peter, like Catherine II., in later days, was a great lover of animals, especially of dogs. In 1708, a poor country priest, of the name of Kozlovski, was put to the torture at the *Préobrajenski Prikaz*, for having spoken improperly of the Tsar's person. He had been heard to say that he had seen the Sovereign at Moscow in the act of kissing a bitch.² There was no doubt about the fact. The unlucky priest had happened to pass down the street just at the moment when the Tsar's favourite dog, Finette, had bounded into her master's carriage, and was rubbing her muzzle against his moustaches without any resistance on his part. Finette, called Lisette by some contemporaries, who have confused her, doubtless, with a very favourite mare, competed for the Tsar's favour with a great Danish dog, whose stuffed body now has its place amongst the souvenirs so piously preserved in the gallery of the Winter Palace. This honour is shared by the mare, a present from the Shah of Persia—a small animal, but with muscles of steel. Peter rode her at Poltava. There is a story that Finette once played a part in politics. An edict had been published, forbidding the presentation of petitions to the Tsar, on pain of death. The friends of an official who had been sentenced to the knout for some breach of trust, fastened an ingeniously drawn-up appeal to the Sovereign's clemency, to the pretty creature's collar. Their stratagem was crowned with success, and their example largely followed. But Peter speedily discouraged all imitators.³

¹ Pylaief, p. 210.

² Documents of the Préobrajenskoïé Secret Chancery.

³ Scherer, vol. iii. p. 294.

IV

The great man often sought his pleasures and relaxations in very inferior company. It must be admitted that his acquaintance with good society was but limited. The Margravine of Baireuth was a terrible gossip, and owned the worst tongue, perhaps, that ever wagged in the eighteenth century. Yet there must be a certain amount of truth in her rather amusing story of her meeting with the Tsar during that sovereign's stay at Berlin in 1718. Peter had already met her five years previously. The moment he recognised her, he rushed at her, seized her in his arms, and scratched her face with his rough kisses. She struggled, slapped him in the face, but still he held her tight; she complained, was told she would have to make up her mind to it, and so submitted. But she took her revenge by jeering at the brutal monarch's wife and suite. 'She had with her 400 so-called ladies. Most of these were German servant girls, who performed the duties of ladies-in-waiting, serving-women, cooks and laundresses. Almost every one of these creatures carried a richly-dressed child in her arms, and if any one enquired to whom the children belonged, they answered, with all sorts of Russian salaams, "The Tsar has done me the honour of making me the mother of this child."' "

The habits and the friendships contracted by Peter in the German suburb, superior as they were to the social level of old Russia, were not calculated to fit him for the Courts and elegant circles of the West. And with these old associations he never broke. When he was in Moscow, in 1723, he spent his evenings between an old friend of his, the wife of an official named Fadenbrecht, to whose house he had his meals carried, Bidlau, a doctor, Gregori, an apothecary, Tamsen, Konau and Meyer, tradesmen, and a certain young lady of the name of Ammon, barely sixteen years of age, in whose house dancing went on till five o'clock every morning.¹ And even this is a somewhat favourable specimen.

On Easter Day, the 24th of March 1706, Peter causes his letter to Menshikof to be signed, and a postscript added to it, by the friends gathered round him to celebrate that solemn day. In that intimate circle, I notice a private

¹ Bergholz, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 183.

soldier, two *Dienshtchiks*, and finally a peasant, who, not knowing how to write, replaces his signature by a cross, affixed to an intimation that he had been given leave 'to get drunk for three whole days.'¹

Peter never slept alone. His bed was generally shared by Catherine, very rarely by a mistress. He sought his couch for purposes of slumber. He was sensual, but not voluptuous, and his love affairs, like all his other affairs, were got through as quickly as possible. I have already (page 106) explained his dislike to sleeping alone, and in the absence of his wife, he would avail himself of the company of the first *dienshtchik* he could lay his hand on. This individual had orders to lie exceedingly quiet, under pain of being well thrashed. Peter generally woke in a bad temper. In the country, when the hour for his daily siesta came, he made one of these *dienshtchiks* lie down on the ground, and used his stomach for a pillow. This man did wisely, unless his digestion was an exceptionally quick and easy one, to be in a fasting condition, for, on the slightest movement, or sound, the Tsar would spring to his feet and fall upon him.²

All this notwithstanding, he was really exceedingly indulgent and easy-going, in all matters connected with his personal service. Nartof has given us the story of the cupboards invented by the Tsar, in which he would lock up, beds and all, certain of his orderlies who, in spite of his reiterated orders and threats, persisted in spending their nights in houses of ill-fame. He kept the keys under his pillow, and used to get up, after midnight, to inspect these dormitory cells. One night he found them all empty. His astonishment and rage were terrible. 'So the rascals have made themselves wings,' he cried, 'I'll cut them to-morrow with my *doubina*.' But when morning came, and the culprits appeared before him, he contented himself with promising them a better watched and less comfortable prison, if they relapsed into misbehaviour.³ His personal service was performed by six *dienshtchiks*, amongst whose names we notice those of Tatishtchef, Orlof, Boutourlin and Souvarof, two couriers to go distant messages, one valet-de-chambre,

¹ Golikof, vol. iii. p. 94.

² Scherer, vol. ii. p. 81.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 36. The personal portion of Nartof's recollections deserves a certain amount of credence, but the remainder of the work is a later compilation, the only value of which, and that a doubtful one, resides in the various anecdotic sources from which it has been drawn.

Polouboiarof, one secretary, Makarof, and two under-secretaries, Tcherkassof and Pamiatin. Nartof also belonged to the household, in his quality of assistant in the Tsar's ivory and wood-turning, at which he spent several hours a day. The whole household formed an exception to the general rule, according to which every one who had to do with the sovereign, whether closely or not, detested as much as they feared him. Peter the Great, like the great Catherine, was always adored by his personal servants.

This was far from being the case with his collaborators, who, for a certain period, were generally his favourites as well. With the exception of Menshikof, none of them maintained this last position for any length of time. Where they were concerned, phases of condescension, and even of extreme partiality, invariably led up to a swift veering of the Tsar's humour, and a terrible change of fortune. So long as things went well, they were treated like spoil children. Peter's care for their health and comfort was unflinching. He even found them wives. When the calamities which overtook the Tsar's unhappy son, brought one of the myrmidons of the law, named Alexander Roumiantsof, who had been employed to capture him, into high favour, a Boyard offered him his daughter, who had a considerable dowry, in marriage. Roumiantsof, the son of a needy gentleman, in the Government of Kostroma, was himself a poor man. 'Hast thou seen the girl?' asked Peter. 'No, but I hear she is a sensible girl.' 'That's something, but I want to see her.' He went that evening to a gathering at which he knew the young girl was to be present, had her pointed out to him as soon as he arrived, shrugged his shoulders, said very loud, as if speaking to himself, '*Nitchémou nie byvat!*' (no good at all) turned on his heel, and departed. The next day, meeting Roumiantsof, he repeated '*Nitchémou nie byvat!*' adding, 'I will find thee something better, and that by this evening. Be here at five o'clock.' Roumiantsof naturally kept the appointment, and, at Peter's order, seated himself in his cabriolet. He was more than astonished when he saw the carriage stop before the house of Count Matviéief, one of the noblest and richest subjects of the Tsar. Entering, Peter addressed the Count familiarly, kissed him, and said point blank, 'You have a daughter whom you want to marry. Here is a husband.' Without further pre-

liminary, Matviéief's daughter became Roumiantsof's wife. According to certain accounts, she had already, at the age of nineteen, been the mistress, and the fickle mistress, of her sovereign. Peter, who had lately surprised her in circumstances which left no doubt of this unfaithfulness, is supposed to have selected this means of guarding her fragile virtue, having previously, with his own hands, administered healthy correction to the fair lady.¹

But the following chapters will give my readers fuller information as to the most certain and probable facts concerning this obscure corner in the Tsar's personal history.

¹ Pylaief, *Old Moscow*, p. 52.

BOOK II—THE TSAR'S ASSOCIATES

CHAPTER I

COLLABORATORS, FRIENDS AND FAVOURITES

- i. The Aristocracy and the Popular Element—The *Diatiches*—The great Favourites—Komodanovski—The *Prince Cæsar*—The Secret Police—The Red Square at Moscow—Old Russia—A bear as house steward—Loyalty, energy, and ferocity—Oriental suppleness—Shérémétief—A poor leader and a fine soldier—Menshikof—The pastry cook's boy—The Tsar's minion—Peter's indifference to scandal on some subjects—*Alexashka*—a Prince—Profusion of titles and functions—Omnipotence—Abuse of power—A military leader—An administrator—Faults and virtues—An apology for theft—Peter's indulgence worn out—Semi-disgrace.
- ii. Collaborators of the second rank—Golovin—An Admiral who was no sailor, and a Foreign Minister who was no diplomat—Russian sailors and foreign sailors—Apraxin and Cruys—Politicians and police agents—Golovkin—Tolstói—A high-born Russian Diplomat of the new school—Boris Kourakin—Some great *Diatiches*—Néplouief and Tatishchev—The Tsar's Confessor, Nadajinski—A match with the Abbé Dubois' secretary.
- iii. The Agents of a lower order—Iagoujinski and Shafirof—Polish Jews—The Viesselovski—The *Prybylsitchiks*—Kourbatof and Solovief—Possoshkof, the first Russian Economist—The fortunes of the Demidofs—Lomonossov.
- iv. Foreign Collaborators—They often did the work, but remained in the shadow—Shérémétief and Ogilvy—Vinnius—James Bruce—Ostermann—Devier, a Portuguese Jew—The invariable close of brilliant careers—The final crash—Frenchmen—De Villebois—A scene in the Imperial bedroom—Englishmen—Perry and Fergusson—Poushkins' negro ancestor, Abraham Hannibal.
- v. General summing up—Peter and Leibnitz—The great German's posthumous rôle.

I

'ALONE, or almost alone, our Tsar struggles to raise the country, millions of individual efforts drag it down.'

When Possoshkof thus picturesquely described Peter's isolation, and the difficulties he met with, in carrying out his reforms, he indulged in a slight exaggeration. The

very accession of the great reformer was, as I have already shewn, the result of a party triumph. His first revolutionary attempts were inspired by those about him, and he certainly would never have been able to compress the work of several centuries into twenty years, unless he had been assisted by a very considerable amount of extraneous energy and intelligence. The country which he ruled so proudly, and which indeed he watered with the sweat of his own brow, yielded a fruitful harvest of effort and capability, rough-hewn, no doubt, but not the less gallant for that. On the heels of the earliest workers—Lefort and the Naryshkin—came others, native or foreign, none of them indeed great leaders, nor very profound politicians, but men of action like Peter himself, like him hastily and superficially educated, yet possessing a remarkable and varied power of initiative, of endeavour, and of resource. When the old aristocracy failed him, and this soon came to pass (the old nobility, alarmed by the boldness of his measures, outraged by the roughness of his manners, and bewildered by the giddy rapidity of his movements, soon began to hang back and even steal away), he went below it, down even into the lowest strata of the populace, and thence took a Demidof and a Iagoujinski, to replace a Matviéief, or a Troubetzkoï. Thus a school of statesmen rose around him, men of peculiar stamp, the prototypes of the *Dziatels* (agents) of a later date; soldiers, diplomatists, or political economists, turn about, with no defined speciality (a trifle amateurish in that matter), who knew neither prejudice nor scruple, without fear, if not without reproach, who marched straight forward, without a backward glance, always ready for strong measures, wonderfully fitted for the rapid performance of every kind of duty, and for the bold assumption of any and every responsibility. They answered Peter's purpose, and the purpose of the work which they were to do with him. He did not, and in that he was right, expect them to be paragons of virtue. In 1722, Campredon writes to Cardinal Dubois,—‘I have the honour of pointing out to your Eminence, that unless, with my diplomatic powers, I am provided with means of giving money to the Russian ministers, no success can be expected, however advantageous an alliance with France may appear to the Tsar; for, if his ministers do not perceive their own personal benefit in it,

their intrigues and secret enmities will foil any negotiations, even those which might be of most service, and bring most credit to their master. I notice proofs of this truth every day of my life.'¹ The ministers here referred to were Bruce and Ostermann, and the proofs, very solid ones, perhaps, of which the French Envoy boasts, had not prevented them in the preceding year, at Nystadt, from outstripping Peter himself in the defence of his interests, and obtaining conditions of peace which he had not dared to hope for.

Three men, Romodanovski, Shérémétief, and Menshikof, tower above all others in the great monarch's personal circle. The two first were the only human beings to enjoy a privilege denied to Catherine herself, that of being received by the sovereign, unannounced, whenever they chose to appear in his presence. When he dismissed them, he always conducted them himself to the door of his cabinet.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century, none of the princely families descended from Rourik equalled the Romodanovski in rank and influence. Yet only a century before, this family held quite a secondary position, inferior to that of the Tcherkaski, Troubetzkoï, Galitzin, Repnin, Ourussof, Shérémétief, and Saltikof, equal to that of the Kourakin, Dolgorouki, Volkonski, and Lobanof families.² A younger branch of one of the younger branches of the great Norman house, that of the Princes of Starodoub, it took its name, somewhere in the fifteenth century, from a property called Romodanof in the Government of Vladimir. The prominent rank it subsequently held, was attained in virtue of a kind of hereditary function, which in itself would hardly be looked on as a claim to much distinction. When the Tsar Alexis established an office of the secret police at Preobrajenskoïé, with subterranean dungeons and question chambers, all complete, its management was confided to Prince George (or Iouri) Ivanovitch Romodanovski. After his death, his son inherited the post, and finally transmitted it to his own heir. The son of George Ivanovitch was the *Prince César*, with whom we have already made acquaintance. It was, it seems, in 1694, and as a reward for a victory gained by him over the mock King of Poland, represented by Boutourlin, that Peter took it into his head to dress Romodanovski up in

¹ July 24, 1722 (Paris Foreign Office).

² Kotochihin, *Memoirs* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 25, etc.

this strange title. It was a mere joke, but we know how whimsically the great man would mingle pleasantry with serious matters. It is not easy to understand how such a man as the Prince Feodor Iourievitch could consent to act such a farce, his whole life long. There was nothing of the buffoon about him, neither the necessary docility, nor the indispensable love of frolic. Perhaps, in his barbarian simplicity, he never realised the insulting and degrading reality so apparent under the mockery. In Peter's eyes, evidently, he represented a sort of huge compromise with a state of things he himself had doomed to destruction. Therefore it was, that the reformer endured his long moustaches and his Tartar or Polish garments. But, even while Peter set up and worshipped this strange idol, in whose person he seemed to commemorate and atone for the past, he scoffed at and spurned that hated past itself, and all the ideas and memories he associated with, and loathed in, it. The old Kreml of Moscow, and the semi-Asiatic pomp of the Tsars, the ex-vassals of the great Han, which had crushed his early years—the old Burg at Vienna, and the majesty of the Roman Cæsars, which had crushed him too, in that never-to-be-forgotten moment during his earliest appearance on the European stage, all these things he desired to cover with ridicule, and cast into oblivion.

The person chosen to play this dubious part, was not devoid of merits of his own. Placed apparently, at all events, above any possibility of attack, he set himself, in all reality and truth, above suspicion. His loyalty was unshakable; he was faithful, honest, and unswerving. His heart was flint, his hand was iron. Amidst all the intrigues, the meannesses and the cupidity which seethed around the sovereign's person, he stands out, upright, haughty, clean-handed. When an insurrection threatened at Moscow, he cut it short, after his own fashion. He picked 200 rioters, at hazard, from the crowd, and hung them by their ribs on iron hooks on the Red Square (so appropriately named), in the old city. Even in his own house, he had dungeons and instruments of torture, and when Peter, during his absence in Holland, reproached him for some abuse of his terrible power, committed while in a state of drunkenness, he sharply replied,—‘It is only people who have plenty of leisure and can spend it in foreign countries, who can afford to waste

their time with *Ivashka*. Here we have other things to do than to gorge ourselves with wine, *we wash ourselves every-day in blood!*¹

Notwithstanding this, I remark a certain Oriental strain of surliness in his character. He does indeed thwart the sovereign secretly, and even occasionally goes so far as to censure him openly, so that in 1713, the self-willed despot himself does not seem to know how to manage 'this devil of a fellow who will do nothing but what he chooses himself.' Romodanovski appears to have taken his sovereignty very seriously, and never permitted any jesting on the subject. When Shérémétief announced the victory at Poltava, he addressed him as *Sir* and *Your Majesty*. No one entered the courtyard of his palace except on foot and bare-headed; even Peter himself left his cabriolet at the outer door. He was surrounded with all the luxuries of an Asiatic monarch, and his personal freaks were quite of a piece with them. When he went out hunting, he was attended by 500 persons, and every visitor, of whatever rank, who entered his presence, was forced to empty a huge glass of coarse brandy, seasoned with pepper, served by a tame bear, which growled threateningly. If the brandy was refused, the bear forthwith dropped his tray, and hugged the visitor.² Yet this very same man took good care not to forget that Menshikof was a great lover of fish, and never failed to send him the best in his own fishponds, and he bestowed many a barrel of wine and hydromel on a *Dienshtchik* of the name of Pospíelof, a great drunkard, and a prime favourite of the Tsar's.³

Shérémétief was also, after his own fashion, a representative of former times. At Narva, like everybody else, he lost his head. At Poltava, like the rest, he did his duty bravely. In his will, drawn up in 1718, he confided his sinful soul to the Tsar.⁴ That one trait describes the man. He was simple, candid, and very ignorant. 'What rank did you hold before you came here?' he enquired of a non-commissioned officer, just arrived from Germany. 'Master at arms.' 'Arm, does not that mean *poor*, in German? In your own country you

¹ *Peter I.'s Writings and Correspondence*, vol. i. pp. 226, 671.

² Hymrof, *Countess Golovkin and the Times she Lived in*, p. 76, etc.

³ Dolgoroukof, *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 55.

⁴ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. i. p. 86.

were poor; here you shall have the same rank, and be rich into the bargain.'¹

But he was a splendid soldier: always in the forefront of the battle, tranquil and calm under a hail of bullets, adored by all his men. If he happened to see any officer, who had served under him, passing through the streets of Moscow, he never failed to leave his coach, as richly gilt as Menshikof's own, and clasp his old comrade's hand. Generous, open-hearted, and hospitable, he fed an army of beggars, and kept open house for fifty persons every day. He was one of the last specimens of the best and most attractive type of the old Russian Boyard.

Alexander Danilovitch Menshikof was another and very different type. He opens the long series of great parvenus, the creatures of the Russian Sovereign's caprice. The story goes, that, in his youth, he had been a pastry-cook's boy. According to family documents, he should be descended from an ancient Lithuanian family. There may be truth in both these versions. The son of a needy gentleman in the neighbourhood of Smolensk may very well have sold pastry in the Moscow streets. A knight of St Louis certainly sold cakes at Versailles, in Sterne's days.² In any case, his father never was more than a corporal in the Préobrajenski regiment, and he himself was serving in it as a sergeant, somewhere about 1698. He may have combined his military duties with the sale of *pirogui*. Even in Peter's newly-raised regiments a very curious commercial element, the outcome of traditions inherited from the *Streltsy*, long survived. But already, at that period, the young man was supposed to stand high in the Tsar's good graces. The Sovereign always called him by a pet name (*Alexashka*), and, even in public, lavished proofs of an almost passionate tenderness upon him.³ My readers will recollect the story of the part he is said by some persons to have played in a violent scene at the house of Sheïn, during which Peter had to be recalled to reason.⁴ According to other stories, his favour was originally due to a different, though an equally salutary and important, intervention in the Sovereign's destiny. Peter, we are told, while on his way to dine with a certain Boyard, was accosted by

¹ Bruce's *Memoirs* (London, 1782), p. 113.

² *Sentimental Journey*, chapter headed 'The Pastrycook.'

³ See Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 267.

⁴ See *ante*, p. 128.

the *Pirojnik*. Pleased with his countenance, he took him with him, and desired him to stand behind his chair during the meal. Just as the Tsar stretched out his hand to help himself to a dish, a gesture, and a few low words, from the pastry cook, suddenly checked him. Some hours previously the *Pirojnik* had been in the Boyard's kitchen, and had observed preparations for an attempt to poison the chief guest. The dish was forthwith given to a dog, the truth of the allegation proved, the Boyard and his accomplices arrested, and thus *Alexashka's* astonishing career began.¹

Born in 1763, a year before Peter himself, tall, well-built, and handsome, Menshikof, unlike his master and the great majority of contemporary Russians, had a pronounced taste for cleanliness, and even for personal elegance. The representative part which he was later called upon to play was the result, to a certain extent, of this peculiarity. Yet he was quite uneducated; he never learnt to read, nor to write, beyond signing his name.² According to Catherine II., who should have had good opportunities for learning the truth, he never had 'one clear idea on any subject whatsoever.'³ But, like Peter, though in a very inferior degree, he had a talent for appropriating notions on every subject, including the habits of the great world. He was his Sovereign's shadow; he was with him under the walls of Azof, and shared his tent; he accompanied him abroad, and shared his studies there. He took part in the destruction of the *Streltsy*, and is said to have boasted that, with his own hand, he had shorn off the heads of twenty of the rebels. After having allowed Peter himself to clip his beard, he performed the barber's office on all the members of the Moscow Municipality, and then led them into the presence of the Tsar, thus symbolising his future co-operation in the great man's work. As early as 1700, he seems to have performed the duties of major-domo in the Sovereign's house, and to have occupied a quite special place in his affections. In his letters Peter calls him '*Min Herzenskind*' (child of my heart), '*Min bester*

¹ Bruce's *Memoirs*, p. 76.

² The instances quoted by Oustrialof (vol. iv. p. 210) in support of his contrary assertion of signatures to which the favourite is said to have added such postscripts as *vzial* (received), or *prinial i spisalsia* (received and answered), are not conclusive. Catherine's testimony is far more convincing. See also Essipof's *Bio-graphy* (Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 569), and Kourakin (Archives, vol. i. p. 76).

³ Letter to Grimm, Jan. 20th, 1776 (*Sbornik*).

Frant' (my best friend), or even '*Min Bruder*,' forms which he never used in addressing any other person. The favourite's answers are couched in equally familiar terms, and—this detail is very significant—he never adds any formula of respect before his signature, although Shérémétief himself always signed '*Naïposliédnicshyï rab tvoï*' (the lowest of your slaves).¹

According to general contemporary opinion, there was something more than mere friendship in this connection. Peter's indifference to imputations of a vicious nature was, and always remained, very singular. A master-at-arms, in the Prócobrajenski regiment, convicted, in 1702, of having spoken in the most open manner on this odious subject, was merely relegated to a distant garrison. Such incidents happened several times over.²

Yet the favourite certainly had mistresses—two sisters, Daria and Barbara Arsénief—both of them maids of honour to the Tsarevna Nathalia, the Sovereign's favourite sister. He wrote them common letters, and they may be concluded to have thought it better not to betray any sign of jealousy. He ended by marrying the eldest, in connection with whom Peter appears to have had some personal obligation of a doubtful character. When Menshikof led Daria to the altar, he did so in obedience to a sort of order from his august friend, inspired by some mysterious scruple. Here we have an unexplained case of conscience, a confused and darkly-shadowed corner in the Tsar's personal history, full of dubious secrets and strange promiscuities, which tempt and yet repel the enquiring student. In 1703, the two friends, 'although unworthy,'—so runs Peter's letter to Apraxin,—were made Knights of St Andrew, on the very same day.³ And then *Alexashka's* wonderful fairy tale began.

In 1706, he was a Prince of the Holy Empire; the following year, after his victory over the Swedish general Mardefeldt, at Kalisz, he assumed the rank of a sovereign Russian prince (*Vladiétielnyï rousskiï Kniaz*), with the title of Duke of Ijora, and the whole of Ingria as his hereditary appanage. He was also Count of Dubrovna, of Gorki, and of Potchep; hereditary Sovereign of Oranienbaum and of Batourin; Generalissimo; Member of the Chief Council; Marshal of

¹ *Writings and Correspondence of Peter the Great*, vol. iii. pp. 780-782.

² Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 236.

³ *Ibid.*

the Empire; President of the Military Administration; Admiral of the Red; Governor-General of St Petersburg; Lieutenant-Colonel of the Préobrajenski Regiment, and also of the two regiments of the Body Guard; Captain of the Bombardier Company; and Knight of the Orders of St Andrew, St Alexander, the Elephant, the White and the Black Eagle.

Even this did not suffice him. In 1711, he was negotiating with the Dowager Duchess of Courland to buy up her title and her Duchy. The next year, being confident of success, he caused the officials of the country to make their subjection to him.¹ Though obliged, by the indignation of the Polish Court, to delay taking definite possession of the Duchy, he would not renounce his hope of ultimate success, and revenged himself on the Polish lords, by forcing them to sell him huge tracts of country at an enormous sacrifice. He added enormous wealth to all his other splendours. In the Ukraine he bargained with Mazeppa for the whole district of Potchep, and even took possession of property there, which actually belonged to Cossack officers. A stake adorned with his arms, set up in any village, equalled a proprietary title. He had no hesitation, in case of necessity, about adding a gallows. He undertook commercial speculations, too, which, backed as they were by his almost absolute power, could not fail to be lucrative. In conjunction with Tolstor and the Jew Shafrof, he set up factories, which he endowed with arbitrary privileges.²

The only limit his power knew, was the Sovereign's periodical repentances, which were always followed by measures of repression directed against the favourite's abuses. With these exceptions, his dictatorship was, in a sense, more absolute than Peter's own, for it was never limited, in Menchikof's case, by any higher considerations. If the Imperial resident, Pleyer, is to be believed, he even went so far as to countermand the Tsar's own orders. He would ill-treat the Tsarevitch in his father's presence, seizing him by the hair and throwing him on the ground. The *Tsarevny* all bowed down before him.³

What was the real value of the man, and how was it that

¹ Despatch from de Bie to the States General, 26th April, 1712 (Archives of the Hague).

² Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 120, etc.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part ii. pp. 613, 628, 656.

he dared and possessed so much? From the military point of view, he had neither knowledge nor even bravery. 'He lacked experience, knowledge, and courage,' to quote Whitworth.¹ But he showed great endurance in bad fortune, was full of dash when the fickle goddess smiled, and in any case his energy never failed him. 'Active, enterprising,' says Campredon, adding, 'far from discreet, inclined to falsehood, ready to do anything for the sake of money.'² That strange mixture of serious-mindedness and puerility, which was so characteristic of Peter, was equally evident in the case of his *alter ego*. In August 1708,—when just about to cross the Beresina, and to fight a battle, which the Swedes ardently desired, and which he himself desired to avoid,—I find him absorbed in the new liveries for the German servants he was sending to his wife. This matter of detail seems to have had enormous importance in his eyes. While he measured gold lace and sketched out pocket flaps, Charles XII. manœuvred in such a manner that the battle became inevitable. Yet, in the result, it was less disastrous for the Russian troops than might have been expected. The steadiness with which they resisted the shock gave presage of their future victory. The favourite had pulled himself together. In later years, Patiomkin would appear to have been much of the same school.

At Poltava he wasted twenty-four hours before undertaking a pursuit, which, if it had followed more immediately on the defeat of the Swedes, would infallibly have left Charles and the remnants of his beaten army in their conqueror's hands. By the time he came up with Löwenhaupt on the banks of the Dnieper, the king had reached the other bank, and the favourite, who only had a strong body of cavalry with him, found himself in a somewhat awkward position. But his lucky star and his audacity combined to save him. He made as though the whole victorious army were close upon his heels. The enemy, already beaten and demoralised, allowed itself to be deceived, and Löwenhaupt capitulated.

In the administrative department he chiefly used his talents to enrich himself. He was a bold and, for the most part, unchecked thief. In 1714, the excess to which he

¹ Despatch, Sept. 17, 1708 (Sbornik, vol. i. p. 64).

² May 3rd, 1725 (French Foreign Office).

carried his depredations did, indeed, bring about an enquiry, which dragged on indefinitely. But he was crafty. He produced old accounts, according to which the Treasury owed him far larger sums than those claimed from him. And when, after four whole years, he found himself without an answer to a fresh accusation, he betook himself to Peter's presence, and addressed him somewhat after the following fashion:—'These accusers and examiners of mine, none of them know what they are talking about, nor what they do; they are making a fuss about trifles. If they choose to call the personal use I may have made of certain sums, of which I had the handling, a robbery, they are out of their reckoning altogether. Yes, I stole the 100,000 roubles of which Nieganovski speaks. I have stolen a great deal more,—how much, I do not know myself. After Poltava I found considerable sums of money in the Swedish camp. I took some 20,000 roubles for my own use. Your steward, Kourbatof, a very honest man, has several times over given me other sums, drawn from your exchequer, both in coin and bullion. At Lubeck I received 5000 ducats, and double that sum at Hamburg; in Mecklenburg and the German Swedish possessions, 12,000 thalers; at Dantzic, 20,000, and more that I have forgotten. I have used the authority you gave me after my own fashion. I have done, on a large scale, what other men about you do on a small one. If I have been wrong, I should have been warned before.'

Peter was disarmed. He felt the blame was partly his, and once more he passed the sponge across the slate. But fresh accusations came pouring in. A credit of 21,000 roubles, assigned in 1706, for cavalry remounts, had utterly disappeared. The same thief had done the work. This time the military authorities interfered, and the favourite was condemned to loss of his military rank and functions. Once more Peter forgave him. But the original enquiry went on, and others were added to it, arising out of the Imperial minion's breaches of trust in Poland, in Pomerania, in the government of St. Petersburg,—everywhere, in fact, where he could lay his hand, and there was hardly a province or an administrative department which escaped it. The Tsar grew weary at last. His favourite's insatiable greed threatened to cause diplomatic friction. The Dutch Resident accused Zotof, the governor of Revel, of

squeezing the merchants belonging to his country, and dividing the produce of his exactions with Menshikof. Year by year Peter's regard grew colder. Little by little the old familiar intercourse died away. One day at last, in a fit of displeasure, he threatened to send the incorrigible thief back to his old life. That very evening, Menshikof entered his presence, dressed as a pastry-cook, with a basket on his head, calling out, 'I sell fresh-baked *piroguis*.' The Tsar burst out laughing. The traitor had more than one string to his bow. He had Catherine's constant, unvarying, faithful support. She had been his mistress, and she never forgot it. He also played on the Tsar's passionate affection for his second wife's son, little Peter Petrovitch. He never neglected, during the sovereign's absences, to send him constant news of his 'priceless treasure,' telling how he played at soldiers, repeating his childish phrases, and going into ecstasies over his charms. But, above all things, he was the one man on whom, putting integrity apart, Peter could absolutely reckon to second him, or supply his place, with a vigour, a resolution, and resourcefulness which never failed. An army sent into Finland, under Apraxin, was in danger of being starved to death. Peter was away. The Senate, when appealed to, came to no decision; the merchants refused to deliver food, unless it was paid for; and the treasury was empty. Menshikof ordered the stores to be broken open, laid hands on all the provisions he could find, and sent them off to Abo. There was a desperate outcry; the senators, who were all more or less interested in the corn trade, threatened to have the favourite arrested. He faced the storm bravely, and had no difficulty, when the Tsar returned, in justifying his action. His bold stroke had saved the troops in Finland.

And lastly, the unworthiness of his accusers was in his favour. One of them, Kourbatof, was himself convicted of fraud in 1721, and heavily fined. Thus, till the end, Menshikof held his own, more and more closely threatened, but always contriving to float. In 1723, when for the twentieth time, Catherine ventured to take up the cudgels for him, Peter broke in roughly, 'Menshikof came into the world just as he has lived, his mother bore him in sin, and he will die a knave. If he does not amend his ways, he will end by having his head cut off.' The old affection had quite died out.

Even the favourite's wit, which had so often wrung the Tsar's forgiveness from him, no longer served him as it once had done. Peter, coming into his palace, saw the walls bare, and the great rooms stripped of furniture. He enquired the reason of this desolation. 'I have had to sell my hangings and my furniture to pay the fines imposed upon me.' 'Well, buy them back, or I will double the fine.'

The charm was broken. Menshikof was removed from the presidency of the military administration; he was forced to disgorge the 15,000 serfs he had stolen in Mazeppa's former domains.¹ At the time of Peter's death, he was living in semi-disgrace. When Catherine succeeded, he attained to yet greater position and power, saw his daughter on the very steps of the throne, and then, on the eve of that supreme triumph, his fortune crumbled beneath his feet, and he ended his days in exile, on a daily pittance of a few copecks. I have no concern, in this place, with that latter half of his career; I may perhaps return to it on a future occasion.

I cannot, whatever may have been imagined and asserted on this subject, accept this collaborator of the Tsar's as a man of great intelligence; but he must be recognised and appreciated as a force which,—used by Peter, serving as it did the mightiest will known in modern history before Napoleon's time, and so sent whirling across the wild uncultivated steppes of the Russia of those days, to open up that wilderness,—had a special value of its own. It overthrew all obstacles, it broke down all resistance, and, like some fiercely-rushing, muddy river, it carried fruitful germs in its mire-stained and turbid waters.

The man himself, haughty, brutal, covetous, and cruel, was neither loveable nor loved. When, in 1706, his house at Moscow was burnt down, the whole town openly rejoiced.² Peter did not complain. He always had a secret leaning towards those of his servants who could not rely on anything, or any person, save himself.

¹ For Menshikof's biography see Essipof, Solovief, vol. xvi, p. 231, etc.; Golikof, vol. vi, p. 407, etc.; Nartof, p. 47, etc.; Posselt, vol. i, p. 545, etc.

² Russian Archives, 1875, part ii, p. 49 (Essipof).

II

I now come to the second order of the Tsar's collaborators. Some of them, and these not the most interesting, belong to the old nobility. Feodor Aléxiéievitch Golovin, who was called, after Lefort's death, to the chief place at the Admiralty, and to the head of the Office of Foreign Envoys (*Posolskoi Prikaz*),—the Foreign Office of those days,—was neither a sailor nor a diplomat. His only claims to distinction consisted in the fact that his brother Alexis had married one of Menshikof's sisters, that one of his minions, named Iagoujinski, was later to be specially favoured by the Tsar, and that he wore the distinctive symbol of his naval dignity, a compass, with a most majestic air. Apraxin, who succeeded him as Lord High Admiral, in 1706, possessed more serious qualities, but a great part of his success and superiority was due to the presence of the Norwegian sailor, Cruys, at the Admiralty Board. He was heartily jealous of his subaltern, and seized an opportunity of getting rid of him, which presented itself in 1713, with shameful eagerness. A court martial, presided over by the Lord High Admiral, condemned the foreign sailor to death, in consequence of the loss of a ship caused by some misunderstanding about a signal. This ancestor of a noble family, the aristocratic pretensions of which are, it must be confessed, disputed by many genealogists, was anything but chivalrous! Cruys, whose sentence was commuted by Peter to one of perpetual banishment, was soon back in St. Petersburg; nothing went right at the Admiralty after he left it.

The Presidency of the *Posolskoi Prikaz*, with the title of Chancellor, passed from Golovin to another mere figurehead, Gabriel Ivanovitch Golovkin. Peter, who inaugurated the system which Catherine II. was largely to develop, had a fondness for separating titles from their functions, and found this an easy means of gratifying his taste for low-born favourites. Having reduced the titular minister to a mere dummy, he caused the actual work of his foreign policy to be performed by such men as Ostermann and Iagoujinski. Gabriel Ivanovitch, who had been one of the Sovereign's childish playfellows, and later one of his most constant boon companions, and, who, it may be added,

was related to him through the Naryshkin, had a fine aptitude for taking his master's tone. He thus addresses him in an official letter—'Your Majesty has condescended to insinuate that my gout was the result of too much devotion to Venus. I owe it to your Majesty to inform you of the real truth, which is, that in my case the trouble rather arises from excess in drinking.' In the matter of honesty he was no better than his fellows. He was generally supposed to be in Mazeppa's pay, and in December 1714, Peter reproached him, before the assembled Senate, with the frauds, of which he had been convicted in conjunction with Menshikof, with regard to military supplies.¹

Peter found some better servants, as far, at all events, as intelligence went, among the ranks of the old aristocracy. Tolstoi, who belonged to this class, fully justified the Tsar's remark—'Any one who has anything to do with him had better put a stone in his pocket with which to draw his teeth.' And this other, dropped with a kiss on the formidable politician's brow, 'Oh! head, head, if I had not known you to be so clever, I should have cut you off long ago!' Tolstoi's services, shameful, some of them, but all of them remarkable in their way,—he acted at one time as a diplomat at Vienna and Constantinople, at another as a spy on the unhappy Alexis,—earned him the blue ribbon of knighthood, a seat in the Senate, and an enormous landed property. His teeth were not drawn until after Peter's death. When he was eighty-two years old, he came into conflict with Menshikof, and ended by tasting the bitterness of exile, on the inhospitable shores of the White Sea.²

Another aristocrat, Boris Ivanovitch Kourakin, appears on the threshold of the eighteenth century,—the earliest and already supremely attractive incarnation of the high-born Russian diplomatist, with whom, since those days, Europe has grown familiar,—full of Oriental cunning and Slavonic adaptability,—as much in love with literature as a frequenter of the Hotel Rambouillet,—and as passionately fond of every kind of elegance as a Versailles courtier. He entered the Tsar's family by his marriage with Xenia Lapouhin, the sister of Peter's first wife. He contrived to make the most of this relationship, at the favourable moment, and,

¹ De Bie to the States General, Dec. 21, 1714 (Archives of the Hague).

² Popof, *Study of Tolstoi (Old and New Russia)*, 1875.

later on, to cause it to be forgotten. He began his career at a very early age—first of all as the representative of Russia in London, at the Court of Queen Anne, then in Hanover, at that of the future King of England, and finally in Paris, during the Regency, and the early years of Louis XV.'s reign. He died in 1727, before he had reached the age of fifty. In the course of his diplomatic career he strikes us as having been sorely puzzled, more than once, as to his personal behaviour, but he always contrived to maintain his own dignity and that of his country, hiding his ignorance and awkwardness under a mantle of pride and charm, which never failed him.

But I must keep this list within limits. The most interesting figure in the group is certainly that of Basil Nikititch Tatishchev, descended from Rourik, through the Princes of Smolensk, and the progenitor of a race of men as turbulently active as himself. Here we have the *dîcîatîel par excellence*,—Peter's best pupil. He was brought up in a school at Moscow, kept by a Frenchman. When he left it, Peter sent him abroad, with Niéplouief, and a number of other young men, to complete his education. Some of these, Niéplouief amongst the number, were already married. Travelling by Revel, Copenhagen and Hamburg, they went to Amsterdam, where they found a whole colony of Russian students. Twenty-seven of their number were forthwith despatched to Venice, where they were to take service with the fleets of the Republic. Thus Niéplouief took part in an expedition against the Island of Corfu. The whole of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast from Cadiz to Genoa was dotted, in those days, with these Russian student apprentices. Special agents,—Béklémishev for Southern Europe, Prince Ivan Lvof for Holland, and one of the Zotofs for France,—were deputed to overlook and direct their travels, and their work. When they returned home, Peter awaited them in his cabinet, and at six o'clock in the morning, candle in hand,—for it was mid-winter and the sun had not risen—he verified their geographical knowledge, by the map, treating them very roughly, if they did not do themselves credit, and showing them his toil-worn hands, which he had hardened purposely 'as an example to all the world.'¹

¹ Niéplouief's *Memoirs*, p. 103. Piekarski's *Science and Literature in Russia*, pp. 141, 142.

Thus prepared, Niéplouief served his country as a diplomat in Turkey, as Chief of the Administration in Little Russia, and as Director of Mines in the Ural. Tatishtchef far surpassed him in many-sidedness, in the ease with which he applied his powers to every kind of duty, and in untiring activity. He was a model pupil, who spent his whole life reciting his well-learned lesson. Like his master, he was perpetually on the move, and had his finger everywhere,—in military matters, diplomacy, finance, administration, science, trade and manufactures. Like him, he was an eager worker, deeply sensible of his own responsibility. Like him, he lived a life of perpetual activity, and was perpetually stirring others up to action. Like him, he was universal, superficial, and minute; like him too,—though bound to the East with bonds that still held him closely,—he deliberately turned his face, and mind, in the very opposite direction. He was present at the taking of Narva in 1704. In 1711, while accompanying Peter along that fatal road which was to lead them to the banks of the Pruth, he made all sorts of enquiries and archæological excavations, in the hope of discovering the tomb of Igor, Rourik's legendary son. Then, going abroad again, he spent several years in Berlin, Breslau and Dresden, immersed in fresh studies, and busily collecting a library. A little later, I find him performing diplomatic functions at the Congress of Aland. Then, again, he engages in a huge undertaking—that of preparing a general atlas of the Russian dominions. And later yet, Peter, just starting for his Persian Campaign, is offered a book to peruse on the journey, a 'Chronicle of Mourom,' written by the *Diciatiel*, who suddenly appears in the character of a historian. And even this did not suffice. He was sent into the Ural, where the search for copper mines had not been crowned with complete success. He started without delay, reported serious flaws in the local administration, denounced the oppression which the native tribes had suffered at the hands of the agents of the Central Power, founded the town of Ekaterinenburg—destined to play such an important part in the future development of the mining industry—established schools for the people, and yet found time to learn French, with the help of a grammar received during his stay at Aland.

At the time of Peter's death he was still a young man. He continued to take an active and personal share in affairs

of the most varied kind, and at his death, left behind him a considerable literary work, which has been published by Muller. It comprises three volumes of Russian history, to which—thanks to a discovery of Pogodin—two others were later added, and an Encyclopædic Dictionary, carried up to the letter L. The value of these literary efforts, which was sharply attacked by the eighteenth century historians, led by Schlözer, has been considerably vindicated since their time.

Tatishtchef was no exception to the common rule. He was removed from his offices by his master in 1722, in consequence of accusations brought against him by Nikita Demidof, and, like so many others, died in exile, though more stoically than most of his fellows. When he was seventy years old, feeling his end approaching, he mounted his horse, rode to the parish church, heard Mass, went on to the graveyard, chose his own place there, and bespoke the priest's attendance for the following day. He breathed his last at the very hour he had foretold, just as the last sacraments were being administered to him.¹

Peter was honoured, and singularly fortunate, in having a man of so much real worth and moral character about him, at a period when he was surrounded by such beings as Zotof and Nadajinski, that strange Confessor, whose hand he would kiss at the close of Mass, and whose nose he would pull five minutes afterwards:² a man whose drinking powers he backed, while in Paris, against those of Dubois' secretary,—also a priest, and a noted toper. When, within an hour, the French Abbé rolled under the table, Peter cast his arms about the victor's neck, and congratulated him on having 'saved the honour of Russia.' This Nadajinski left enormous wealth behind him. Other men, and of a very different stamp, happily, helped Peter to lay the foundations of his country's greatness.

III

Tatishtchef's character and origin have both earned him a special place in the list of the contemporary 'makers' of the great reign.

¹ Popof, *Tatishtchef and his Times*. Bestoujet-Rioumin, *Study in Old and New Russia*, 1875.

² Pollnitz's *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 66.

Iagoujinski, the son of an organist and schoolmaster, employed by the Lutheran community in Moscow, began by performing the functions of a boot-black, to which he added others on the subject of which 'decency,' so Weber puts it, 'forbids' him 'to enlarge.'¹ Thus it came about that Count Golovin, one of his employers, bethought him of placing the boot-black in Peter's service, with the object of counteracting Menchikof's influence. The new comer was superior, in one respect, to the old favourite. Like him he was a thief, but he made no secret of his thievery, and kept it, too, within more reasonable limits. When the Sovereign spoke, in his presence, of having every speculator hanged, he made that celebrated answer, 'Does your Majesty desire to get rid of all your subjects?'

He was faithful, too, after a fashion of his own; he never betrayed the cause which his protector had sent him to champion. He fought resolutely against Menshikof, and was not afraid to enter into open struggle with the favourite's great protectress, Catherine herself. His courage, far exceeding his talents,—which indeed appear to have been very moderate,—was his only claim to his position as Public Prosecutor; one in which he showed a world of energy, and a severity for other people's weaknesses, only equalled by the indulgence he claimed for his own. But the great favourite, who felt his own omnipotence encroached on, had his revenge at last, and, after Peter's death, Iagoujinski was seen in a state of intoxication—for he practised every kind of excess—stretched upon the newly-closed coffin, tearing the funeral pall with his finger nails, and calling up the avenging shade of the mighty dead.

Like Iagoujinski, Shafirof (Peter Pavlovitch) was of Polish-Lithuanian origin, but his antecedents are more shadowy and obscure. His grandfather, who had settled at Orsha, in the Province of Smolensk, was called Shafir, and bore the surname common amongst his Jewish kindred, down to the present day, of Shaña or Shařoushka. He was a broker, an individual who even now would seem an indispensable adjunct to the surroundings of most Russian country gentlemen. The long greasy gaberdine he wore, unmistakably indicated the functions he performed, and

¹ H. Hermann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, 1880, p. 178.

the race from whence he sprung. Peter Pavlovitch discarded the gaberdine, but he preserved all the other distinctive qualities of the type. The Tsar took him out of a shop at Moscow, and bestowed him on Golovkin, to assist him with his correspondence;—all Jews, Polish or otherwise, have a talent for languages. When, after the Battle of Poltava, Golovkin was made Chancellor, his assistant rose with him, and the former cloth-merchant's clerk became Vice-Chancellor. He really directed all the foreign relations of the country. And he did his work well. In that perilous business on the Pruth, his talents worked a miracle, and saved, or something very like it, both the Tsar and his Empire. This put him on the pinnacle of his glory. He had grown rich, of course,—he had been made a baron,—equally of course,—he had married five of his daughters into the greatest families in the country, Dolgorouki, Golovin, Gagarin, Hovanski, and Soltykof. Suddenly, there came a gust of wind,—and he was swept away. Menshikof, whose own harvest he had prematurely reaped, the Chancellor Golovkin, whose accession he had too openly coveted, and Ostermann,—himself a parvenu, who desired to stand in the Vice-Chancellor's shoes, took advantage of one of Peter's prolonged absences, to plot his ruin. On the 15th of February, 1723, he was actually on the scaffold, his head already laid on the block, and 'the executioner's assistants pulling at his feet, so that his great belly might touch the ground.'¹ But he escaped death. One of Peter's secretaries arrived, just in time, with a letter commuting his sentence to perpetual banishment. He attended the Senate for the ratification of this letter, and, according to the testimony of an eye-witness, 'trembling still, and with death in his face,' he received the congratulations and hand-clasps of his colleagues, who had un-animously sentenced him to execution. He took measures, of course, which resulted in his not being sent to Siberia, was imprisoned at Novgorod, and there patiently awaited Peter's death. The moment this event took place, he recovered his liberty, re-entered political life, as President of what we should call the Board of Trade, and, by means of new commercial operations, soon recovered his confiscated fortune.

¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxi. p. 195. Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 141.

His father's sister married another baptized Jew, who, under a borrowed name, became the progenitor of another family of agents, which played a prominent part in the diplomatic history of the reign, the Viesselovski.

The *Prybylshchiks*,—agents specially connected with the Exchequer, and inventors of new sources of revenue (*Prybyle*, profit)—form a class apart in the great category of the *Dic̄iatels*. Of this class, Kourbatof was the most eminent representative. His figure, a new one then to Russia, and even to Europe in general, is that of the true modern financier, greedy of gain, but always desirous of preserving a nice balance in fiscal matters. Peter himself could not always rise to the level of this advocate of wise economic formulas, and ended by sacrificing him to the spite of that fierce Inquisitor, Romodanovski, whose sanguinary excesses Kourbatof had ventured to disapprove. The man was certainly not immaculate, and his conduct in the unimportant position of Vice-Governor of Archangel, to which he was finally relegated, even appears to have justified his disgrace. None the less, he appears before us as the victim of that struggle between two worlds, two conceptions of the State, and two ideas of social existence, the right side of which the great Sovereign himself did not always succeed in keeping.

This struggle is even more sharply and more dramatically defined in the story of the unfortunate Joseph Aléxiéiévitsh Solovief, the son of an Archangel merchant, whom Peter first of all appointed a Director of Customs, and afterwards, his commercial agent and banker in Holland. Solovief, whose financial operations had attained considerable importance, was involved, in 1717, in the disgrace which befel one of his brothers, who filled a modest position in Menshikof's household. He was prosecuted, extradited, given over to the Secret Police, and finally acknowledged innocent. But his legs and arms had been broken in the Torture Chamber, and all his fortune, somewhere about a million of roubles, had utterly disappeared.

Solovief was but a 'common fellow.' Possoshkof, who shared this disability, gives an amusing, though a sad enough description of the relations of people of his own class with the mighty ones of the day. Here is his own story of his adventures with Prince Dimitri Mihaïlovitch

Galitzin, from whom he requested permission, in 1719, to establish a brandy distillery. At that period the Russian Montesquieu, who had some private property, possessed influential relations, and was Kourbatof's partner in several industrial enterprises, had already attained a certain importance. Yet no one, to judge by the answer his petition received, would dream it. Without a word of explanation, he was laid violent hands on, and cast into prison. At first he was astounded, then he bewailed his fate, and finally, after a week, ventured to recall the fact of his existence to the absent-minded Boyard. 'Why am I in prison?' he asked. 'Why the devil is this man in prison?' enquired Galitzin; and as no one could answer the question, he signed an order for Possoshkof's release.

This love of summary methods, and haughty scorn of individual rights, was equally acceptable to the old Russian spirit, and to the revolutionary tendencies of the modern party. Possoshkof himself was their accomplice. He was a violent partizan, both of Peter's reforms and of the extreme measures he employed to ensure their success. He would gladly, even, have increased their merciless severity. In his eagerness to inculcate the theories of that economic school, of which the *Prybylshtchiks*, led by Kourbatof, were the practical exponents, he would fain have called all that intolerance, over-haste, and excessive zeal, so dear to all sectarians, to his aid. His fate resembled that of most of his fellows. Nothing, he believed, but the iron ploughshare and the devouring fire could suffice to open the soil of his native land, which for ages had lain fallow and briar-grown. The terrible machine he helped to set in motion crushed and destroyed himself. How did it come about that, although from one end to the other of his career, and by the solitary effort of a thought which evidently sprang from the same source, he walked, as it were, on Peter's flank, he never succeeded, even temporarily, in entering into close relations with him? In this respect his case was an altogether special one. He had ideas to dispose of, and Peter seems to have had a settled determination never to accept anything of the kind from his own people. Apart from that, the general tendency of the reign was towards equality, and the great Tsar would have had no scruple about taking a *moujik* to be his helper, and even his closest companion. Of this the

story of the Demidofs gives clear proof. The history of the beginnings of the Demidof fortune—the doubtful anecdote of the pistol marked with the name—in those days a celebrated one—of Kuchenreiter, and confided to a workman at Toula, who had undertaken to mend it, and the Tsar's colloquy with the young gunsmith,—is in common knowledge.

The Tsar: 'Ah! if we could, only make pistols like that.'

The Gunsmith: 'That's no very difficult matter.'

The Tsar (with an oath and a box on the ear): 'Do the work first, rascal, and then you may boast.'

The Locksmith: 'Look closely first, Batioushka, and see. The pistol you admire is of my making. Here is its fellow.'

The gunsmith was then known as Antoufief; his father, Demid Grigorévitch, a serf of the Crown, working as a blacksmith in a village of Parshimo, in the district of Alexin, and province of Toula, had settled in the principal town of his province towards the year 1650. In 1694—the date usually assigned to this first meeting with the Sovereign, the reputed source of the proverbial riches of the Demidof family, and of the present development of the mineral industry in Russia,—the old blacksmith's son, Nikita, was nearing his fortieth year.¹ He was a married man, and Peter, so we are told, after having duly apologised, invited himself to dinner in his cottage. The meal was a cheerful one, and the Tsar paid the reckoning with a concession of ground in the neighbourhood of Toula, in which an iron mine was to be opened and worked. This was a mere beginning. By degrees the activity and enterprising spirit of Nikita and his son Akinfy (Hyacinth) were welcomed in all the mines in the Ural. In 1707, Nikita was personally ennobled under the name of Demidof. In 1720 his honour was made hereditary, but he kept to his peasant dress; and Peter, though he always treated him with the greatest consideration, continued to address him by his rustic and familiar name of Demidytsch. It was not only as a commercial and business man, the founder of numerous works at Shouralinsk, Vynorsk, Viershniétagilsk Nijniétagilsk, and Douhomsk, that the Tsar valued Nikita. His gay and jovial character, his turn for satire, and his biting wit, made

¹ Russian Archives, 1878, vol. ii. p. 120. Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 163, etc.

him a worthy follower of Lefort. He died at Toula in 1725, at the age of 68, leaving behind him an immense fortune, and—a prodigious and almost unique fact in those surroundings, and at that period—a reputation for perfect honesty. Russian industry has more reason to congratulate itself on this forefather than the Russian navy on the ancestor with which it pleased Peter to endow it, in the person of Golovin.

Another peasant's name, one of the greatest in modern Russian history—equally eminent in literature and science, but connected also with much industrial endeavour and success—here rises to my memory. When Poushkin asserted that Lomonosof—historian, rhetorician, mechanic, chemist, mineralogist, artist, and poet—was 'the first Russian University,' he hardly said enough. The active period of Lomonosof's life (he was born in 1711) was not actually contemporary with Peter's. Yet he belongs to that great period; he was its direct outcome and its worthy fruit—the very personification of its genius, with all its civilising virtues, its deficiencies, and its contradictions. His humble origin, though he never forgot it, and rather took pride in it, did not prevent his praising even the laws of serfdom, the rigour of which the Reformer greatly increased, and from claiming—peasant as he was himself—200 peasants for the perpetual service of a factory he had founded. Son of the people though he was, the songs and ceremonies and popular legends of his country were nothing to him but a remnant of a distant past, long since gone by, and devoid of any save an historic interest. One of the deepest and most expressive forms of the national poetry, the *Bylines*, traces of which may even now be discovered in some of the northern provinces, entirely escaped this poet's notice. He had no ear nor soul for anything but the classic poetry of the west, with its strict forms, so soon to fall out of date—the ode, the panegyric, the heroic poem, the tragedy, and the didactic epistle. In literature, as in science, he was very apt to consider his activity as a duty to be performed in the Tsar's service, a kind of official task. The universal process of requisitioning and enrolment, which Peter's system tended to carry even into matters of individual intellect, and activity, is clearly denoted in this peculiarity.

Yet Lomonosof played an important part in that swift

and general transformation, out of which modern Russia rose. He imparted a powerful and definite impulse to that mighty effort whereby the broken links of a chain which parted in the thirteenth century, were welded afresh, and his native country re-endowed with the intellectual patrimony common to the whole civilised world.¹

IV

Most of Peter's foreign collaborators,—so far, at least, as appearances went,—were mere subalterns. They often did all the work, but they generally remained in obscurity. Peter would never have committed a fault, the crushing responsibility of which the Empress Anne was to assume in later days,—that of putting his country under the direct power of such a man as Bühren. As long as the great Tsar reigned, Ogilvy, the Scotchman, might plan the battles, which ended by checkmating Charles XII., but it was Shérémétief who won them.

These foreigners, whether Scotchmen, Germans, or Dutch, assimilated themselves to their local surroundings,—became Russianized, in fact,—with the most extraordinary facility. That shifty and eminently porous soil rapidly absorbed all their native originality. The only thing which distinguished Andrew Vinnius, the Russian-born son of a Dutch emigrant, from his Muscovite surroundings, was his superior education. He professed the religion of the country, he spoke its language, he had even adopted its moral habits. He might be Menshikof's superior in such particulars as the casting of cannon, and the manufacture of gunpowder,—but in the matter of filling his own pocket, he was very little better indeed. And his fellows in the tumultuous stream of foreign adventurers, which Peter let loose upon his country, belonged, as a general rule, to the same order, and betrayed all the defects of their profession. The germs of corruption and degradation, which the Tartar conquest had sown in the national soul, sprang into life, in answer to their touch.

James Bruce, a Scotchman, who passed at Court for a chemist and astronomer of genius, and was held in the city

¹ Biliarski, *Materials for Lomonosof's Biography* (St. Petersburg, 1865), Lamanski, *Lomonosof, Biographical Studies* (St. Petersburg, 1864).

for a sorcerer, had none of the qualities of a Newton or of a Lavoisier, but many of the peculiarities of an ordinary sharper. Endless lawsuits,—for abuse of authority, speculation, dishonesty in the supply of his department (he was at the head of the artillery),—brought him to loggerheads with justice. The Tsar always ended by forgiving him. There was a certain dilettantism, and self-taught quality about the rascal's knowledge, which was irresistibly attractive to Peter, and which, in those surroundings, possessed a certain value of its own. A whole legend had grown up round the light which streamed, on long winter nights, from the windows of his laboratory in the Souharez Tower. His astronomical discoveries bordered closely on astrology, and his celebrated Calendar, published in 1711, is all moonshine. But it was Bruce who organized and directed the Tsar's schools of navigation, artillery, and military engineering; he presided over the Board of manufactures and of mines; he was the real inspirer of the learned correspondence which Peter made believe to keep up with Leibnitz, and, on the occasion of the Treaty of Nystadt, he gave proof of remarkable diplomatic powers.

They were all much alike, ready for anything, doing many useful things indifferently well, and remarkable, especially, for cunning and energy.

At Nystadt, Bruce, whose success won him the title of Count, and the grade of Marshal, had a colleague, Ostermann, a Westphalian, whose two years at the University of Vienna had given him a reputation for learning. Campredon, writing in 1725, thus sums up his capabilities: 'He knows German, Italian and French, and thus makes himself indispensable; otherwise, his principal cleverness consists in pettifogging chicanery, cunning, and dissimulation.' These talents sufficed,—in a country where Golovkin was chancellor,—to obtain him the dignity of vice-chancellor, in succession to Shafirof, in 1723. But Campredon overlooks one of his qualities—a most remarkable power of work. Ostermann, to humour his master's suspicious instincts, would cypher and decipher his own despatches, sitting at them whole days and nights, without ever going out of doors, or taking off the red velvet dressing-gown, which he wore even on the 18th of January, 1724, when he ascended the scaffold which his predecessor had mounted before him.

Like that predecessor, he was pardoned, and ended his days in exile

Beside the Polish Jew, Shafirof, we perceive the grotesque outline of the Portuguese Jew, Devier. Peter picked him up in Holland, where he was serving as cabin boy on board a merchant ship, in 1697. In 1705, he was an officer in the Guard; in 1709, he was Camp Commandant. In 1711, desiring to marry well, he fixed his choice on one of Menshikof's sisters, who was both old and ugly. The favourite, looking on his request for this lady's hand as a deliberate insult, ordered his lacqueys to thrash the insolent suitor. Three days later, the little Jew led the betrothed of his choice to the altar. He had got out of the scrape, no one quite knew how, alive, though sorely damaged in person, and covered with blood as he was, had carried his complaint before the Tsar, who promptly avenged him. Yet, crafty, supple, humorous, and intensely servile as he was, he did not succeed in escaping fresh reverses. He was evidently predestined to physical chastisement. In 1718, he was the first holder of a post,—then a new one in St. Petersburg,—of general chief of police, and, in this quality, he had to accompany Peter on a tour of inspection through the streets of the capital. A broken-down bridge (Peter had consented to have bridges built over the numerous canals, which he had caused to be cut through the town) stopped the Tsar's carriage. He alighted, and sent for materials with which to repair the breach. He even put his hand to the work himself, then, when it was finished, laying down his tools, he seized his *doubina*, and, without a word, bestowed a hearty thrashing on the chief of his police. This done, the sovereign returned to his carriage, beckoned to Devier to take his place beside him,—‘*Sadis brat,*’ (sit down, brother),—and quietly took up the thread of a conversation which had been interrupted by the incident. And, yet again, that scarred back was to feel the lash. In 1727, after Peter's death, Menshikof, the Jew's unwilling brother-in-law, was to write his vengeance there in bloody stripes. At the foot of the decree which condemned the former chief of police to exile, he added the words, ‘*Bit knoutom,*’ (let him be knouted).¹

My readers will remark the uniform and monotonous

¹ Shoubinski, *Historical Sketches*, p. 77. Loupakof, *Monograph*, in the *Journal of the Moscow Polytechnic Exhibition*, 1872, No. 99.

tendency of all these brilliant careers, towards the same final and inevitable crash, in which some great historical verdict and punishment would always seem to overshadow mere personal revenge and petty spite. Whatever their origin, whatever the line they took, these men, who none of them cared for law or gospel, or for any principle of rule, save that of their own interest and ambition, invariably ended by falling into the same abyss.

They came from every corner of Europe. Münich, a Bavarian, who began his extraordinary career as the constructor of the Ladoga Canal, elbowed François Guillemotte de Villebois, a gentleman from Lower Brittany, who had begun his career in France as a smuggler. Villebois' Memoirs, which are full of exaggerations, and of assertions, the falsehood of which have been clearly proved, are of little value, either as regards Peter's history or his own.¹ According to his story, he saved the vessel which carried the Tsar from Holland to England from shipwreck. The Russian Sovereign, 'who loved extraordinary men,' at once engaged his services, and, from the subaltern position he then occupied, Villebois, at a bound, became aide-de-camp, and captain in the navy. I will not undertake to follow him too closely through the details of the adventure for which, two years later, he was condemned to the galleys. Having been sent by Peter, during very cold weather, from Strelina to Kronstadt, with a message to Catherine, and having drunk a great deal of brandy on the road to warm himself, the sudden change of temperature, when he entered the Tsarina's bed-chamber, completely overcame him. At the sight of the disordered couch and of the beautiful woman stretched upon it, he lost his head and all his self-control, and calmly recounts the consequences of his frenzy, which even the Sovereign's screams, and the presence of her ladies in an adjoining chamber, could not avert. Catherine is said to have suffered severely from this outrage. As for Peter,—in spite of his wife's condition, which necessitated careful surgical treatment,—he appears to have taken the catastrophe very philosophically. 'The brute,' he said, 'did not know what he was doing, so he is innocent; but we must make an example of him,—let him go to the galleys for a couple of years.'

¹ Published, with certain omissions, in the *Revue Retrospective*, 3rd series, vol. xviii. p. 351, etc. The manuscript is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

The only absolutely certain historical point about this story is the condemnation to the galleys. Yet Villebois does not seem to have stayed there more than six months. At the end of that time he was pardoned, married, by the Tsar's good offices, to the daughter of Glück, the former pastor of Marienburg, and thus brought into close connection with the Sovereigns. In Elizabeth's reign he was rear-admiral, and commandant of the port of Kronstadt.

Two other well-born Frenchmen, André and Adrien de Brigny, fought beside this Corsair in the ranks of the Tsar's army; but, brave as they were, they were quite devoid of the spirit of intrigue indispensable, in those days, to success, and never rose to any prominent position. Englishmen,—perhaps on account of the fastidiousness, angular-mindedness, and lack of adaptability of the race,—were in a minority in the motley crowd of foreigners, through whose means Peter endeavoured to inoculate his subjects with western culture. The celebrated Perry, who entered the Tsar's service as an engineer, and soon left it in disgust, only spent a few years in the vicinity of his comrade in misfortune, Fergusson. This last had been engaged to direct a mathematical school, and never succeeded in getting one kopeck paid him for his services.¹ Otherwise every nationality was represented. There was even a negro.

This dusky henchman of the Tsar, who was born about the year 1696, was carried off from his own country at the age of seven years, and taken to Constantinople, where Count Tolstoi, the Russian ambassador, purchased, him in 1705. Through all the course of a singularly active life he was haunted by a painful vision, the memory of his beloved sister Lagane, who had cast herself into the sea, and swum for a considerable distance behind the ship which was bearing him from her. On the shores of the Bosphorus he received the surname of Ibrahim. During the Tsar's visit to Vilna, in 1707, he was baptised,—Peter standing godfather, and the Queen of Poland godmother,—and was thenceforward known as Abraham Petrovitch Hannibal. He began his Russian life as page to the Sovereign, and, though he made intimate acquaintance with the *doubina*, he gained his master's favour both by his pretty tricks, and his singularly bright intelligence. He was a negro prodigy. In 1716, he was sent to

¹ Perry, *Present Condition of Russia*, p. 257, French edition (Amsterdam, 1718).

Paris to complete his education. He had already learnt Dutch, and soon won himself a reputation in the French army, in the ranks of which he at once took service. During the campaign against the Spaniards, in 1720, in the course of which he received a wound on the head, he was promoted lieutenant. When he returned to Paris, he found himself a kind of celebrity, much sought-for in drawing-rooms, where he is said to have had considerable success. But his serious tastes soon drew him away from frivolous gaiety. He entered the School of Engineering, and did not leave it until 1726, when he returned to Russia, was made lieutenant in the Bombardier Company, which Peter once commanded, and shortly married. His wife, a very beautiful woman, the daughter of a Greek merchant, brought a *fair-haired* child into the world. He forced her to take the veil, had the child brought up with every care, found her a husband, gave her a fortune, but never would see her face. A very jealous, violent, loyal, upright, and exceedingly avaricious man. After Peter's death, he fell out, like everybody else, with Menshikof. Like almost everybody else, he was sent into exile, and did not return from Siberia till Elizabeth's time, when he became a full general, and died in 1781, at the age of eighty-three years.¹ Another glory has added itself, since those days, to his name and history. He was Poushkin's paternal great-grandfather.

V

As a matter of fact, the Tsar's circle, whether native or foreign, was almost entirely made up of 'utility men' and 'lay figures.' We do not find one really great name, or towering figure. The principal actor, and the part he played, probably took up so much room on the stage, that this was inevitable. My opinion is confirmed by what I notice of the sovereign's relations with the only man in the contemporary European world of equal stature with himself,

¹ Helbig, *Russische Günstlinge* (Tübingen, 1809), p. 135. Bantich-Kamienski, *Biographical Dictionary*. Zazykof, *Lexicographical Encyclopædia*, 1838, vol. xiv. p. 289. Longuinef, *Russian Archives*, 1864, pp. 180, 181. Opatovitch, *The First Wife of Abraham Hannibal*. *Russian Antiquities*, 1877, vol. xviii. p. 69. Poushkin, *Genealogy of the Poushkin and Hannibal Families*, collected works (1887 edition), vol. v. p. 148.

with whom he had intercourse. I have already had occasion to mention Leibnitz's first attempts to attract the Tsar's attention, and the hopes he built on their success. Yet these relations, when once he succeeded in establishing them, brought no particular good fortune to either party,—both indeed would seem to have somewhat lost dignity by them.

From the moment when Peter's first journey through Germany revealed him to the eyes of Europe, Leibnitz seemed possessed with a perfect monomania. All his talk was of Russia and of the Tsar. He was in a state of perpetual excitement, and full of endless plans, all more or less unreasonable, and all tending to the same object, that of attracting the monarch's attention, and winning his esteem. This feverish restlessness may be very naturally explained. The great savant, as is well-known, claimed Slavonic origin, of an ancient and noble nature, common with that of the Polish family of Lubieniecki. He himself inserted, in an autobiographical notice, the following words:—'Leibnitorum, sive Lubencziorum, nomen slavonicum, familia in Polonia.' When he quarrelled with the town of Leipzig, he published the following protest:—'Let Germany lower her pride! The genius that was born with me is not exclusively Teutonic, it is the genius of the Slavonic race, which woke in my person, in this Fatherland of the Scholastics.' And to this distant bond of consanguinity he appealed, when he first addressed Peter, at Torgau, in 1711. 'Sire,' he is reported to have said, 'our point of departure is a common one. Slavs, both of us, belonging to a race, the destinies of which no man can foresee,—we are both of us the apostles of future centuries.'¹ This conversation, unfortunately, turned off to other subjects, and the intercourse thus begun, ended by falling to a much less elevated standpoint. In 1697, when Leibnitz was meditating a scientific plan of campaign for Russia, he still kept at a dignified level. But there was a great come-down in this very year, 1711, when his chief anxiety was to get himself accepted as the Tsar's representative at the Court of Hanover. A taste for diplomacy was one of his weaknesses, and it increased

¹ A letter from Count John Lubieniecki, lately published in the 'Kraj,' a Polish review, confirms, by information drawn from family documents, the truth of Leibnitz's Polish origin, which even the German editors of the great savant's works, Klopp, Guhrauer, and Fertz, have not attempted to deny.

with age. We see him piling application on application, and intrigue on intrigue,—worrying Peter's minister at Vienna, Baron Urbich,—tormenting the Duke of Wolfenbüttel, whose grand-daughter had just been affianced to the Tsarevitch Alexis. All he was able to get was the promise of a *tschin* and of a pension. The fulfilment of this promise was long in coming, and at Karlsbad, in 1712, he came back to the charge, offering his good offices to reconcile Austria with Russia, a magnetic globe of the world, which he had caused to be constructed for the Tsar, and an instrument to be used in planning fortifications. This time he contrived to obtain the title of Privy Councillor, and a gift of 500 ducats, which satisfied him until 1714, when a vacancy in the Russian Diplomatic Service at Vienna once more threw him into a state of agitation. In 1716, he was at the springs of Pyrmont, to which the Russian sovereign had betaken himself,—with a bundle of half-scientific, half-political memoranda in one hand, and a wooden apparatus for the Tsar's paralysed arm in the other,—calling out about his pension, which had never been paid, 'although it had been talked of all over Europe,' piling up expressions of admiration and proofs of devotion,—altogether a wonderful, and pitiable, and most insufferable beggar. Peter strikes me as having been almost indifferent always to the brightness of this great intelligence, which never seems to have succeeded in coming into contact with his own.¹ Within a few months of the visit to Pyrmont, Leibnitz was dead.

A considerable share in the establishment of the Collegial Administration of Russia has been ascribed to him. A letter on which this organisation was based, was long believed to be his composition. But this is far from being true. The original document, which is preserved in the Moscow archives, is not in his handwriting, and other authentic writings of his do not mention it. Three other documents on the same subject, which have also been attributed to him, are certainly not his work. He never, whatever may be said to the contrary, had anything to do with the foundation of the Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg. Peter

¹ See preface of Guerrier's *Selections* (St. Petersburg, 1873), p. 23, and compare Foucher de Careil on *Peter the Great and Leibnitz* (Reports of the Académie des Sciences, Morales, et Politiques,² June 1874).

requested another German, Christian Wolff, to organise and direct this institution, but met with a curt refusal. Wolff thought the climate of St Petersburg too cold, and the pay offered to the Director of the Academy altogether too small; besides which, he was all for replacing the Academy by a university. 'Berlin,' he said, 'has an Academy of Sciences, the only thing lacking is the learned men.'¹ He refused to act in the matter, and restricted himself to recommending some of his friends, Bernoulli, Bülfinger, and Martini, to the Tsar. This circle of hardworking, if not transcendently brilliant, men, surrounded the cradle of knowledge in Russia, to the great ultimate advantage of the country.

The plan finally adopted by Peter for his Academy, was based on a report written by an obscure personage of the name of Fick, a former secretary to the Duke of Luxemburg. Leibnitz's plans went much too far, they extended beyond the Tsar's line of vision, and also, probably, beyond the possibilities of the time and place. Peter never adopted any of the great savant's extreme views. Absorbed as he was, till 1716, by the anxieties connected with his struggle with Sweden, all Leibnitz's proposals fell on an inattentive ear. He never went beyond some appearance of intellectual intimacy, and a scientific correspondence, which he kept up with the assistance of Bruce. Perhaps, too, the doubtful and undignified side of his would-be helper's attitude displeased him, and put him on his guard. The man of genius may have been utterly hidden, under the courtier, and the hungry petitioner.

Yet Leibnitz, that great sower of ideas, did not pass in vain down the furrow traced by the great reformer's plough. The seed he so lavishly cast in all directions, may have been carried away by the winds, and lost in space,—but, in due time, it reappeared. I see fruitful traces of it, in the great work accomplished, at a much later date, under the auspices of the Russian Government, with regard to the study of the Slavonic languages; and Alexander Humboldt's researches on terrestrial magnetism, carried right across Russia, into Central Asia, were certainly inspired by his illustrious predecessor. The influence of such men as Leibnitz, and Peter the Great, is not measured by the limits of their earthly life.

¹ Briefe von Christian Wolff (St. Petersburg, 1860.) Piekarski, *History of Science and Literature in Russia*, vol. i. p. 33.

CHAPTER II

THE FEMININE ELEMENT

- I. The King's Mistress and the Tsar's—Peter a Don Juan—His indifference to propriety—A daring uncle—The women of his circle—Princess Galitzin—Brutality and cynicism—Bestiality and debauchery—Another side of his relations with women.
- II. His marriage—Eudoxia Lapouhin—The honeymoon—Disagreements—An ill-assorted couple—Separation—The cloister—The recluse's romance—Major Glebof—Lovers' correspondence—The investigation—The trial—The lover's fate—The mistress' punishment—Catherine's jealousy—Prison—Eudoxia's turn at last.
- III. The earliest favourite—Anna Mons—Peter's liberality—Deception—Consolations—Menshikof's gynæceum—The Favourite's sisters—The Arséniefs—Catherine Vassilevska.
- IV. Maids of Honour—Madame Tchernichof—Eudoxia—Marie Matviéief—*Terem* and *Harem*—Marie Hamilton—Lover and executioner—A lesson in anatomy at the foot of the scaffold—Catherine's last rival, Marie Kantémir—The wife and sovereign triumphs—A friend—The Polish lady—Madame Sieniawska.
- V. The influence of women on Peter's life, and his own influence on the destiny of Russian women—Russian feeling in the seventeenth century—Hatred of women—Causes and effects—The National genius and foreign influences—Byzantium and the East—The current of asceticism—Family life—Marriage—The Domostroï—Barbarous habits—When woman is sacrificed, man grows vile—The current of emancipation—Peter's reforms—His failures—The importance of his work—A saviour.

I

THE King: 'Ah, brother, so I hear you too have a mistress?'

The Tsar: 'Brother, My . . . do not cost me much, but yours costs you millions of crowns, which might be better spent.'

This scene, which occurred in 1716, at Copenhagen, whither Peter had gone to visit his ally the King of Denmark, is reported in a grave diplomatic document.¹ At first sight, it would appear to give a very fair idea of the part played

¹ Despatch from Loss to Manteuffel, Copenhagen, 14th Aug. 1716. Sbornik, vol. xx. p. 62.

by women in the great Reformer's life. He was too busy, and too coarse, to be a lover worthy of the name—or even a decent husband. He fixed the price of the favours bestowed on his soldiers in St. Petersburg at *one kopeck for three kisses*; and, after his first interview with Catherine, the future Empress, he enriched her with a solitary ducat.¹ Not that he was altogether incapable of appreciating the more delicate charm to be found in the society of the fair sex. We must never forget that Russian feminine society was one of his creations. The presence of ladies at the *Sloboda* gatherings, was the first and most powerful attraction which drew him there. In 1693, when two of the fair guests, at a *fête* given by Lefort, ventured to leave the company unobserved, he sent his soldiers to bring them back by force.² In 1701, when his care for his budding navy kept him at Voronèje, a great number of these ladies joined him there, for the Easter festivities, and were most graciously received. When one or two of them fell ill, he gallantly put off his own return to Moscow.³ If the historical interest of this chapter depended on the memory of such gallantries, my respect, both for women and for history, would lead me to suppress it. But there is another question. In such a character as Peter's, —so hugely complex, from the moral point of view,—surprises burst on us at every turn. As far as external matters go, this side of his personality, in spite of his sociableness, stamps him a boor and a cynical debauchee. He has no care for the woman's dignity, or his own, and he is too ill-bred to have the smallest regard for propriety. Observe this anecdote, related by Baron Pöllnitz, as to the Sovereign's visit to Magdeburg in 1717: 'As the King (of Prussia) had given orders that he was to be treated with every imaginable honour, the different State bodies waited upon him with their presidents. When Cocceji, the brother of the High Chancellor, who was at the head of the Regency, went, with his colleagues, to pay his respects to the Tsar, he found him leaning on two Russian ladies, and caressing them in the most familiar manner. This he continued to do during the whole time of Cocceji's address.'⁴ And here is another, describing his meeting with the Duchess of Mecklenburg, his niece, at Berlin. 'The Tsar rushed to meet the Princess, kissed her

¹ Duclos' *Memoirs* (1839 edition), p. 615.

² Korb, p. 77.

³ Oustrialof, vol. iv. part ii. pp. 555, 562.

⁴ *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 65.

tenderly, and drawing her into an adjoining room, indulged in everybody's presence—even in that of the Duke of Mecklenburg—in the grossest familiarities.'¹ Pöllnitz, who declares that he received this information both from the King himself, and from two other eye-witnesses, adds many not less expressive details, as to the great man's habitual intercourse with the female element at his Court. 'Princess Galitzin was his *doura*, or female fool. Everybody vied in teasing her. She often dined with the Tsar, he would throw the remains of his food at her head, and would make her stand up so that he might pinch her.' According to some other witnesses, the shameful vices of the Princess may have justified, to some extent, the ignominy of the treatment to which she was subjected. A letter from the Prussian Envoy, Mardefield, contains a curious reference, in this connection, to the French Duchesses and the pages in whom they took such great delight,—congratulating them on their being content with these alone. Princess Galitzin had no page,—I will not go the length of repeating Mardefield's explanation of how she supplied this want.²

According to Nartof—generally a fairly reliable witness as to the Tsar's private life—Peter was of a very amorous disposition, but the fit never lasted more than half an hour. He would not, as a rule, force a woman's inclinations, but, as he was apt to cast his choice on servant girls, he very seldom met with any resistance. Nartof mentions one rebel, a laundress; but Bruce relates, in much more dramatic fashion, the story of the daughter of a foreign merchant at Moscow, who, to escape the sovereign's amorous pursuit, was obliged to fly her parents' house, and hide herself in the forest.³ One of the documents published by Prince Galitzin describes the Tsar's struggle with a gardener in Holland, who used his rake to drive away the monarch from the neighbourhood of a garden-girl, whose work he was interrupting.

These details, to which I refer with much diffidence—believing such reference to be part of a historian's duty—repugnant as they are, are not the worst. The Tsar's intercourse with Menshikof was even more revolting. And Menshikof was not the only favourite.

¹ *Memoirs*, 1791, vol. ii. p. 65.

² Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, p. 209.

³ *Memoirs*, p. 93.

II

Peter's first beginnings were commonplace enough,—a very early marriage, followed by some years of tolerably happy married life, and then a gradual cooling of mutual affection. The honeymoon once over, the husband and wife saw but little of each other, for the Tsar was almost always away. But the letters which passed between them were fairly affectionate, and the pet names in which lovers delight may frequently be noticed on their pages. *Lapoushka*, (little hand) was the sobriquet bestowed on Peter, and willingly accepted by him. He was not to be the last person to bear it. Two children came into the world, Alexander, who died in infancy, and Alexis, born under an unlucky star. After the death of Nathalie in 1694, things began to go wrong. Peter, who then had been married for five years, had already contracted some extra-conjugal intimacies in the *Sloboda*, or elsewhere. But he had conducted these affairs with a certain amount of prudence. He was a dutiful son, and Nathalia a very vigilant parent. When her influence was replaced by that of Lefort, two female forms, members of the group of beauties,—none of them, probably, over strict in conduct,—which surrounded the young sovereign at the *Sloboda* gatherings, rose like stars on the horizon of his reign. Both these ladies sprang from the middle class: one was the daughter of Bötticher, a goldsmith; the other, the child of a wine-merchant, named Mons. Political disagreements helped to disturb the harmony between Peter and his wife. Eudoxia belonged to a violently Conservative family; her relations, who were all inclined to oppose the new order of things, then just coming into existence, soon fell into disgrace, lost their positions at Court, and underwent all kinds of ill-treatment. One of them, the Tsarina's own brother, who ventured to insult the favourite, was publicly beaten by the Tsar; another was put to the torture, and horrible things were reported concerning the sufferings he endured. Peter, it was said, soaked his garments with spirits of wine, and then set him on fire. One point, at all events, is certain,—he died in prison.¹ When the Tsar started on his first European tour, Eudoxia's father, and her two brothers, were sent into practical exile, as the governors of remote provinces.

¹ Jeliaboujski's *Memoirs*, p. 40. Solovief, vol. xiv. p. 6 (annexed matter).

In the course of his journey, Peter ceased corresponding with his wife, and suddenly, while he was in London, two of his confidants, L. K. Naryshkin and T. N. Streshnief, were charged with a mission which clearly explained his silence. They were to induce Eudoxia to take the veil. This was the usual expedient, at that period, in the case of ill-assorted marriages, and Peter would appear to have set his heart upon it. His intercourse with the West had settled the poor forsaken lady's fate. She belonged to a very different world, and was doomed to disappear.

Yet she was not without a certain amount of charm. She may not have been pretty,—and even on that subject it is not easy to come to any decision. Catherine herself, her future rival—judging by the pictures, flattered, no doubt, which still exist, and which made a very different impression upon Peter—would appear to us a perfect monster of ugliness. Eudoxia was certainly not a fool. When she reappeared at Court, after her merciless husband's death, she struck those who met her as a kind-hearted old lady, fairly well informed on interesting subjects, and not altogether ignorant of State affairs.¹ Her correspondence with Glebof, of which some extracts are given on a later page, prove her to have been a tender, passionate, and loving woman. Intellectually speaking, she resembled the generality of Muscovite women of that period, who had grown up within the *Terem*; she was ignorant, simple-minded and superstitious. And this was the rock on which her fate was to be wrecked. Evidently she was no fit companion for Peter, incapable as she was of understanding him, following his ideas, and sharing his existence.

When Peter reached Moscow, on his return from his great journey, at six o'clock on the evening of the 26th of August 1698, he went to see some of his friends—Gordon, amongst others—and then paid a visit to the Mons household. But he did not see his wife for some days, and then only in the house of a third person, that of Vinnius, the postmaster-general. The sole object of this meeting was to give his verbal confirmation of the decision already announced through Naryshkin and Streshnief. Eudoxia's answer was what her husband might have expected—an uncompromising refusal. 'What had she done?' she demanded, 'to deserve

¹ Lady Rondeau's letters (Letters from an English Lady), 1776.

such a fate? What fault had he to find with her?' As a matter of fact, she does not even appear to have been suspected of any participation in the political intrigues in which the Tsarevna Sophia and the Tsar's other sisters were implicated. The revolt of the *Streltsy*, which Peter was then preparing to drown in a sea of blood, broke out without the smallest complicity, moral or otherwise, on her part. But the Tsar's mind was finally made up. If he could find no pretext, he was resolved to do without one. He angrily repulsed the Patriarch's intervention in favour of his lawful wife, and, after three weeks of parleying, he cut the Gordian knot. A closed carriage, drawn by two horses, (contemporary chroniclers lay special stress on this detail, which, in a country where the smallest country gentleman never left his house without the escort of a whole troop of horsemen, cruelly aggravated the injustice and hardship of the whole proceeding)—a hackney coach, in fact, carried the unhappy Tsarina to Souzdal, where the doors of the nunnery of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin (*Pokrovskii Diévitshyi Monastyr*) closed upon her.

Innocent though she was, she was more severely treated than others who had been guilty. When Peter imprisoned her sisters, whose connivance with the rebels had been generally recognised, if not absolutely established, he left each of them an income and a certain household. He gave his wife nothing at all; she was his wife no longer. She had ceased to be the Tsarina; she had lost her very name. She was nothing but Helen, the nun, with only one maid to wait on her, and she was forced to appeal to the charity of her own relations, to save her from starvation. She writes to her brother Abraham, 'I do not need a great deal, still I must eat; I drink neither wine nor brandy, yet I fain would be able to offer' This last touch is a curious one, eloquently expressive of one of the most attractive qualities of the old patriarchal mode of life in Russia. Personal suffering was a misfortune of a kind, but inability to show the accustomed hospitality was a supreme distress. The letter continues: 'There is nothing here, everything is rotting away. I know I am a trouble to you, but what can I do? As long as I live, for pity's sake, give me meat and drink! Give garments to the beggar!'¹

¹ Oustrialof, vol. iii. p. 187, etc. Compare Korb, p. 74.

She was only six-and-twenty, and for twenty years yet she was to beat her anguish and despair against the walls of the convent cell, where her life and passion had been entombed. When she left it, with her youth blighted and her heart broken, it was only to endure a still more cruel fate.

Twenty years later, in 1718, the trial of the Tsarevitch Alexis quickened Peter's inquisitorial zeal. It occurred to him that Eudoxia's influence might have been one of those which had incited his son to rebellion. Forthwith, he ordered a descent upon the nunnery, and an enquiry. The secret police drew the cover blank, as far as Alexis was concerned, but this disappointment was atoned for by another discovery. Innocent as she was, politically, Eudoxia was first suspected, and then found guilty, of a criminal love affair with Major Glebof. She had broken down at last. In her downfall and her misery, she had sought for consolation. Major Glebof, who had been sent to Souzdal on recruiting duty, had been touched by her sad fate. She suffered from the cold of her cell: he sent her some furs, and her deeply-grateful letter of thanks paved the way for a dangerous intimacy. He went to see her, to receive her personal thanks, returned again and again, and so they fell in love—she, with an enthusiastic, ardent, and all-absorbing passion; he, far more cautiously, with an affection full of ambiguous reservations. The young man was probably very ambitious; he reckoned on some distant change of fortune, thought of changing his own career, and entering the world of politics. He was in money difficulties too,—he was married, and found his wife a great encumbrance. Eudoxia, poor lady, would have had him leave the service, so that he might remain near her, and belong to her alone. She was always endeavouring to satisfy his needs, and relieve the straits she more than suspected. She was ever ready to bestow the paltry sums which she contrived to wring from the parsimony or the poverty of her own relations upon him. Who could refuse to help him? She sent him money. Did he need more, and yet more? 'Where thy heart is, my *batko*,' (a still more caressing form of *Batioushka*—Little Father) 'there too is mine; where thy tongue is, there is my head; thy will is always mine.'

But, bound by his duties, military or conjugal, and perhaps a little tired of her already, *Batko's* visits grew rarer. Then came despairing and distracted appeals. Had he forgotten

her already? Had she not been able to please him? Had she not done enough? Had not her tears watered his face, his hands, every limb of his body, and every joint of his feet and of his fingers? She has a language of her own, of the most exuberantly pathetic description, which, in the most strange and flowery style, expresses feelings often enough fantastic, and almost incoherent, but always throbbing with evident sincerity,—the brilliant colours of the East, mingled with the rustic tints of her Russian home. ‘My light, my *batioushka*, my soul, my joy, has the cruel hour of separation indeed struck already? Rather would I see my soul parted from my body! O my light! how can I live on earth apart from thee? How can I endure existence? My unhappy heart had long foreseen this moment: long have I wept over it, and now it has come, and I suffer, and God alone knows how dear thou art to me! Why do I love thee so much, my adored one, that without thee life has no value for me? Why, O my soul! art thou angry with me? Yes, so angry that thou dost not write to me. At least, O my heart! wear the ring I gave thee, and love me a little—just a little! I have had another ring like it made for myself. But what! it is by thy will that we are parted? Ah! it is long since I began to see a change in thy love. But why, O my *Batko!* why comest thou not to see me? Has anything happened to thee? Has any one spoken evil of me to thee? O my friend! O my light! my *lioubonka*’ (from *Liubit*, to cherish), ‘have pity on me! Have pity on me, O my lord! and come to see me to-morrow! O my whole world, my adored one, my *lapoushka*’ (it will be recollected that she had originally applied this name to another person), ‘answer me, let me not die of grief! I have sent thee a cravat; wear it, O my soul!—thou wilt not wear anything that I send thee; is that a sign that I cannot please thee? But forget thy love,—I cannot do it! I cannot live without thee!’

But *Batko* continues hard-hearted, and her complaints grow more and more distracted. They are like the continuous monotonous cry of a wounded creature.

‘Who has done me this wrong, poor wretch that I am! who has stolen my treasure? who has shut out the light from my eyes? for whom hast thou forsaken me? to whom hast thou abandoned me? how is it that thou hast no pity

for me? Can it be that thou wilt never return to me? Who has parted thee from me, unhappy that I am? What have I done to thy wife? how have I harmed her? how have I offended you? Wherefore, O dear soul! didst thou not tell me how I had displeased thy wife? and why didst thou listen to her? Why hast thou forsaken me? Assuredly I would never have separated thee from thy wife. O my light! how can I live without thee? how can I remain in this world? Why hast thou caused me this anguish? Have I been guilty without knowing it? Why didst thou not tell me of my fault? Why not have struck me, to punish me,—chastised me in any way, for this fault I have committed in my ignorance? In God's name, do not forsake me! Come to me! without thee I shall die!

And some days later:—

'Why am I not dead? Would that thou hadst buried me with thy own hands! Forgive, forgive me, O my soul! do not let me die! I will kill myself! Send me, O my heart! send me the waistcoat thou hast often worn. Why hast thou forsaken me? Send me a morsel of bread into which thou hast bitten with thy teeth! How utterly hast thou forsaken me! what have I done to displease thee, that thou shouldst leave me thus, orphaned, broken-hearted . . .'

Nine of these letters were produced at the enquiry. They were not written by Eudoxia herself. She had dictated them to a nun named Kaptelina, her confidant, who added postscripts, in which she endeavoured to induce the faithless swain to take pity on the sufferings of the *Matoushka*.

But the imprudent lover had endorsed every one of them, 'Letter from the Tsarina Eudoxia.' The two rings were also found in the possession of the guilty couple. The depositions of the nuns and the servants in the Convent, many of whom were examined, were quite conclusive. Glebof had constantly visited the Tsarina, both in the day-time and at night; they had frequently kissed each other in the presence of witnesses, and were often alone together for many hours. Finally Eudoxia confessed everything.

And Glebof? The popular legend describes him as having behaved like a hero, deliberately, in the midst of the most frightful tortures, taking every other sort of crime upon his shoulders, and even confessing imaginary faults, while steadily refusing to admit anything that could sully

Eudoxia's honour.¹ But the minutes of the enquiry, which are still preserved in the Moscow archives, prove the exact contrary.² Glebof was dumb as to all the other matters whereof he was accused. The only absolute confession he seems to have made concerned this love affair, which dated eight years back. Eudoxia was then 38 years old.

I hasten to say that none of these depositions nor confessions really prove anything. Skorniakof-Pissaref, the Examining Judge sent by Peter to Souzdal, caused fifty nuns, some of whom died under the lash, to be flogged. They said anything and everything he desired. Eudoxia and Glebof were both of them examined in the question chamber. Such frightful tortures were inflicted on the unfortunate officer that it was decided to put him to death on the 16-27th of March, 1718,—the doctors declaring they could not prolong his life for more than twenty-four hours.³ A story was current, that the poor wretch had been imprisoned in a dungeon, the floor of which was covered with sharp spikes, made of very hard wood, on which he was forced to walk barefoot. The final form of execution selected by Peter was impalement. As there were twenty degrees of frost, the unhappy man was wrapped in a fur pelisse, and given fur boots, and a warm cap, so as to make his torture last as long as possible. It began at three o'clock in the afternoon, and continued till half-past seven o'clock on the evening of the following day.⁴ A story, which does not appear altogether credible, relates that when the victim had suffered several hours, Peter approached, and endeavoured to draw fresh confessions from him. The only answer Glebof vouchsafed, was to spit in the monarch's face.⁵

Eudoxia escaped with her life, but she was placed in a

¹ Allainval's *Anecdotes*, 1745, p. 31. The reports of the foreign diplomats resident at Moscow, which echo current opinion, are all in the same sense. Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarewitsch Alexei*, pp. 135 and 207. Despatch from De Bie to Fagel, March 28, 1718 (Archives at the Hague). *Mémoires et Documents* (French Foreign Office), vol. i. p. 129, etc. *Manuscript Reports in the Gotha Library*, etc., etc.

² Partially published in Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 469, etc.

³ Despatch quoted by De Bie.

⁴ *Ausführliche Beschreibung der in der Hauptstadt Moscov . . . vollzogenen grossen Execution* (Riga, 1718). See also the romantic story of Eudoxia and Glebof, as told by Siemiewski, *Eudoxia Laponhin*, in the 'Messager Russe,' 1859, vol. xxi. pp. 219-265. Also, 1860, vol. xxx. pp. 559-599; 1859, vol. xviii. pp. 299-300, *Study by Sniégiref*.

⁵ Dolgoroukof, vol. i. p. 32. Lady Rondeau, p. 32.

still more lonely nunnery, on the shores of Lake Ladoga, where she was yet more closely watched. According to one authority, she was condemned, before being sent to her new prison, to be whipped, by a Court of Bishops, Archimandrites, and other ecclesiastics, and this sentence was carried out by two monks, in presence of the whole Chapter.¹

What can have inspired Peter to bring his consort and her lover to trial, and more especially, to treat them with such ferocity? We cannot suppose him to have been jealous of the wife he had repudiated and forgotten, and left to grow old in the loneliness of her convent. And his habitual indulgence for weaknesses of that particular nature,—especially in cases which bore no reference to political matters,—is well known. Now political matters do not appear to have had the slightest connection with this business. Eudoxia's correspondence with her lover, which never refers to anything but her love, is a clear proof of their perfect innocence in this respect. The Ex-Tsarina had indeed allowed herself to be tempted to resume her worldly garb, and had even permitted those about her to encourage her in the hope of a return, more or less distant, to her former splendours. But there was never more than a hope of this, in any quarter.² May not Eudoxia have been the victim of the jealousy and hatred of a third person? Let us pass over the next seven years. Peter died at last, and this event, instead of being a happy one for the prisoner, was the signal for a fresh aggravation of her cruel fate. She was dragged from her convent, taken to the fortress of Schlüsselburg, and there cast into a subterranean dungeon, which swarmed with rats. She fell ill, and the only person she had to wait on her, was an old dwarf woman, herself in need of service and assistance. Thus two years passed. Who did this thing? Catherine I., the reigning Sovereign. And here, perhaps, we may find the answer to my question regarding Peter. At the end of the two years, a change came. Suddenly, as though in a dream, the door of the dungeon was thrown open, gentlemen

¹ French Foreign Office, *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 129.

² De Bie does indeed mention a plot and a cyphered correspondence, the key to which Glebof refused to give up; but this is a mere repetition of stories current at the time.

in court dress appeared upon the threshold, and bowing to the ground, requested the captive to follow them. Thus led, she entered a luxurious apartment, prepared, so they informed her, for her special use, in the house of the Commandant of the Fortress. A bed, with sheets of the finest Dutch linen, replaced the damp straw pallet she had lately occupied; the walls were hung with splendid stuffs, the table was covered with gold plate, 10,000 roubles awaited her in a casket, courtiers stood in her antechamber, carriages and horses were at her orders. What did it mean? It meant that Catherine I. was dead, and that the new Tsar, Peter II., was the son of Alexis, and the grandson of Eudoxia. The poor grandmother, whose hair had whitened in her prison, went to Moscow to be present at the Coronation of the new monarch. There she took precedence of all the other princesses; she was surrounded with pomp, and treated with the deepest consideration and respect. But it was all too late; her life was broken, and of her own free will, she went back to her nunnery. She ended her days, in 1731, in the *Novodievitshyĭ Monastery*, that refuge for great misfortunes, where Sophia spent her life after the day which saw all her ambitions crumble into dust. According to another tradition, Eudoxia spent her last years in the family residence of the Lapouhin, at Sérébrianoŭié, but even there, she had access, by a gallery, to the neighbouring cloister of St. George.¹ Her tomb is in the Moscow Monastery, and her memory lives even in the present day, in the popular legends and songs of the country.² In spite of all her downfall and disgrace, she has kept the sorrowful sympathy of those humble ones of the earth who are all too well acquainted with bitter suffering.

III

The moment Eudoxia was safely interned in her convent, Peter installed his first 'maitresse en titre.' This position was occupied by Anna Mons, or Monst, or Munst,—*Domicella Monsiana*, as Korb calls her. Her father, before he came

¹ Russian Archives, 1873, p. 652.

² *Memoires of the 'Académie des Sciences' at St. Petersburg*, 1864, vol. v. book ii. p. 206 (Podsossof).

to Moscow, had been a wine merchant, or, as others say, a jeweller, at Minden. The family, therefore, was really of Westphalian origin, although, in later years, it tried to boast of Flemish ancestors, and affixed the particle 'de' before the name it added to its original appellation,—'Mons,' or 'Moens, de la Croix.'¹ The young lady, who began her career as Lefort's mistress, soon forsook the favourite for his master. She accompanied the Sovereign even on occasions of public ceremonial. Neither he nor she shrank from attracting attention. When he stood godfather to the Danish envoy's son, he desired that she should be godmother.² He had a fine house built for her in the *Sloboda*, and the dreary archives of the *Préobrajenski Prikaz* bear witness to the too loudly expressed astonishment of a German tailor named Flank, concerning the glories of a bedroom which was the chief ornament of the dwelling, and in which the Tsar, as it was well known, frequently appeared.³ In 1703, somewhat unwillingly and remorsefully it must be said, he endowed the lady with a property of considerable extent, called Doubino, in the district of Kozielsk. She was a most barefaced beggar, perpetually soliciting the somewhat unready generosity of the Sovereign, in a succession of notes, written by a secretary, to which she added postscripts in bad German. She backs one of these requests by calling on the name of a person whose good offices she could hardly have expected. 'For the love of your son, Alexis Petrovitch, give me that estate!'⁴ Now, Alexis, as my readers will recollect, was Eudoxia's child. Her letters were occasionally accompanied by very modest gifts. Thus she sent her lover, then detained at the siege of Azof, four lemons and as many oranges. He had serious thoughts of marrying her, even although he was carrying on doubtful relations with one of her friends, Helen Fademrecht, from whom he received letters, too, addressed, 'To my Universe,—to my little darling Sun,—my beloved, with black eyes and eyebrows of the same colour.' The Mons affair—a very commonplace one,—lasted till 1703, and closed in an equally commonplace fashion. The Saxon Envoy Königseck, who had only lately

¹ Mordovtsef, *Russian Women* (St. Petersburg), p. 3, portfolio No. lxxxvi. in Peter's 'Cabinet.' The documents of the Minden Municipality here preserved give various spellings of the name.

² Korb, p. 84.

³ Nos. 1243, 1258.

⁴ See extracts from this correspondence in Mordovtsef's work.

arrived at the Tsar's Court, was accidentally drowned, at the beginning of a campaign. In his pockets certain notes were found, the writing and the style of which, Peter easily recognised. He was simple-minded enough to lose his temper, the *Domicella Monsiana* went to prison, and only came out by dint of urgent prayers, and cunning wiles. On recovering her liberty she was forced to content herself with becoming the mistress of Keyserling, the Prussian Envoy, who ended by marrying her. She had a taste for diplomacy, and not sufficient prudence to keep herself out of difficulties. She found herself back in prison, and only contrived to save a few poor remnants of the monarch's former liberality. Amongst these was his portrait, with which she sharply refused to part, on account—some people hinted—of the diamonds in which it was framed. Peter kept his grudge against her for years. The enquiry in connection with this sorry business was still going on in 1707, and Romodanovski had thirty prisoners implicated in it—how, neither they nor he could fairly explain,—under lock and key. A year later, Keyserling, who had already married the lady, took advantage of a moment of good humour to intercede with the Tsar in favour of one of her brothers, who was petitioning for employment. His remarks were very ill-received. Peter cut him short roughly, and spoke his mind with his usual frankness. 'I brought up Mons for myself; I meant to marry her; you have seduced her, and you can keep her. But never dare to speak to me of her or of her relations again.' When the Prussian would have persisted, Menshikof intervened: 'Your Mons is a —; she has been my mistress, and yours, and every one's. Don't let us hear any more about her.' This scene took place, it is only fair to say, after supper, at an entertainment given by a Polish nobleman in the neighbourhood of Lublin. It ended unpleasantly for Keyserling. Peter and Menshikof fell on him with their fists, turned him out of the room, and threw him down stairs. He made a formal complaint, but the business was decided against him, and ended with excuses,—which he was obliged to make.¹

¹ Sbornik, vol. xxxix. p. 410 (Whitworth's Despatches). Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine* (St. Petersburg, 1884), p. 33, etc. (Keyserling's Despatches). Essipof, *Life of Menshikof* (Russian Archives, 1875). Kostomarof, *Russian History told in Biographies* (St. Petersburg, 1881), vol. ii. p. 618. Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 145, etc. Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 67. Lady Rondeau, p. 11. Kosto-

Madame Keyserling, who became a widow in 1711, inspired a fresh passion—the admirer, this time, was a Swedish officer named Miller,—but she died only a few years after her husband.¹

Peter may have been a rancorous, but he was by no means an inconsolable lover. Menshikof, who took Lefort's place in his intimate circle, was as skilful as his predecessor in supplying his master with consolations. Like Lefort, he had his own female following—his two sisters, Marie and Anne, whom he had placed in the household of Peter's favourite sister Nathalia, and two young ladies, Daria and Barbara Arsénief, who also belonged to the Tsarevna's Court, which Court bore a strong resemblance to a harem. A daughter of the Tolstoï family completed this group, and, about 1703, a sixth recruit appeared, who was to take a place apart in the Sovereign's life, and give quite an unexpected turn to the hitherto trivial history of his love affairs. The real name of this young girl is as uncertain as her origin. In the first authentic documents which mention her, she is sometimes called Catherine Troubatshof, sometimes Catherine Vassilevska, and sometimes Catherine Mihailof. Menshikof took her for his mistress, while, at the same time, he made love to Daria Arsénief, whose sister had attracted Peter's attention. His plan was to make Barbara Tsarina, and himself thus become the Tsar's brother-in-law. With this object, he gave himself much trouble about the education of the new favourite. 'For heaven's sake,' he wrote to Daria, 'induce your sister to study both Russian and German closely, she has no time to lose.' Villebois describes Barbara as a plain woman, full of wit, and as spiteful as she was clever. He thus relates the beginning of her intercourse with the Tsar. Peter, who was dining with her and her companions, thus addressed her: 'Thou art so ugly, my poor Barbara, that I do not believe any one has ever thought of making love to thee. But strange exploits are those which please me best, and I will not have thee die without —' and forthwith he suited the action to the word. The loose morals of the Tsar's circle give us reason to believe in the truth of the story. I have already indicated the ambiguous

marof comes nearest the truth, though he is mistaken as to the date of Königseck's death. (See Peter's letter to Apraxin, April 17th, 1703, in *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. ii. p. 152.)

¹ Siémievski, *ibid.* p. 60.

nature of the intercourse between these lovers and their mistresses—the strange confusion and community of sentiments and intimate relations. Peter and Menshikof perpetually appear as taking each other's place, or cumulating rights which might have been held the exclusive property of one or of the other. During their absences, this condition of things is perpetuated in collective messages, which carry tender recollections and endearing words, pell-mell, from one group to the other, frequently accompanied by presents,—cravats, shirts, and dressing-gowns, made by the fair ladies' own hands. Daria Arsénief adds to her signature the words 'the Fool.' Anna Menshikof adds, 'the very thin one.' As for Catherine, she signs, in 1705, 'with two others,' a sentence explained by a passage in the common letter, 'Peter and Paul salute you, and ask your blessing.' Peter and Paul were the two children she had already borne the Tsar. In 1706, the Tsar gathered the whole gay company at Narva, where the Easter festival was spent, and then brought the ladies back with him to St Petersburg, where, as he wrote to Menshikof, 'he was in paradise, in such fair company.' But Menshikof, who was kept in the south with the army, and found it very dull, would gladly have shared that paradise. He wrote to Peter, that as, when he left St Petersburg, he could not well travel about with such a company of ladies, he might as well send them to his friend. But Peter decided otherwise. He brought the whole party in his train from St Petersburg to Smolensk, and from Smolensk to Kief, and it was not until the month of August that he suffered his favourite to meet him in the latter town, where he had a surprise in store for him. Menshikof had promised marriage to Daria Arsénief, and he was now to keep that engagement,—Peter having decided, on his part, to carry out, at a future date, his own promise to the mother of the 'two others.' The favourite was expected to set him an example, and was not to leave Kief until the deed was done. When the ceremony was over, the common treasure was divided. Peter took his way back to St Petersburg with Catherine Vassilevska and Anisia Tolstoï. Menshikof was left at Kief with his wife, his sister Anne, and his sister-in-law Barbara.¹

¹ Essipof, p. 244, etc., *Peter the Great's Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. pp. 283, 322, 540, 770, 816, 1058. Solovief, vol. xvi. p. 68.

IV

A separate chapter of this work is devoted to Catherine Vassilevska. She must not be confounded with the legion of chance mistresses, who flit across the personal history of Peter the Great. Even after her marriage, and her elevation to the throne, she had a daily struggle with rivals, who sometimes threatened her very existence, as wife and sovereign. This occurred in 1706, during Peter's visit to Hamburg, when, a Lutheran pastor having refused to sacrifice his daughter to the Tsar's passion, the monarch promised to repudiate Catherine, and marry the girl. Shafirof, it is said, actually received orders to prepare the wedding contract. But, unluckily for herself, the too confiding maiden consented to grant her admirer an instalment on account of the promised wedding joys, before the hymeneal torch was actually lighted,—and was shortly dismissed, with a gift of a thousand ducats.¹ The heroine of another and less passing fancy is also currently believed to have approached very near to definite triumph, and corresponding rank. Eudoxia Rjevski was the daughter of one of Peter's earliest partizans, who, in spite of that fact, came of a family which claimed the same ancient and illustrious origin as the Tatishtchef, and was devotedly attached to Sophia and her interests. The girl had been the Tsar's mistress before she was fifteen. At sixteen, Peter married her to Tchernishof, an officer seeking advancement, but this did not interrupt his own relations with her. She had four daughters and three sons by him. He passed, at all events, as their father, but the mother's loose conduct rendered the paternity of her children more than doubtful, and compromised her own chances with the Tsar. Her crowning feat, so the scandal-mongers averred, was to call forth the celebrated order given to her husband by her lover,—who had fallen ill, and was inclined to ascribe his sufferings to her,—‘to go and flog Eudoxia.’ The Tsar's usual name for her was ‘Avdotia boi baba’ (Eudoxia ‘the fighter’.) Her mother was the famous ‘Princess-Abbess.’²

Her case, if it were an isolated one, would be hardly worth relating. Unluckily,—and here comes in the interest, sad as

¹ Report by Count Rabutin, Envoy of the German Emperor, *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 490.

² Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 175.

it is, of this particular page of history,—she is a typical figure, representing a period, and a state of society. Her story was much the same as that of Maria Matviéief, the daughter of one of the greatest noblemen of that time, who, as I have already said, ultimately became the wife of Roumiantsof. More beautiful than Eudoxia Rjevski, and more loveable, full of wit and charm of every kind, Maria Matviéief, like her, became one of the Empress's maids-of-honour. The position, such an honoured one in our days, almost amounted, at that time, to a vocation of shame. Catherine's female associates had replaced Nathalia's feminine circle. The *terem* no longer existed in the Imperial palaces; the *harem* remained, a legacy from the Oriental past. Complaisant husbands had taken the place of complaisant fathers. Shortly after Peter's death, Maria Roumiantsof bore a son, who was to be the hero of the next great reign, the victorious General of Catherine II.,—recognised by every one as the son of the great Tsar.

Peter's illegitimate posterity was almost as numerous as that of Louis XIV. It may, indeed, have been somewhat exaggerated; there is no historical certainty, for instance, of the illegitimacy of Madame Strogonof's three sons. The mother, a daughter of the house of Novossiltsof, would appear to have been no more to the Tsar than an entertaining, and hard-drinking, boon companion.

The usual story begins again with another maid of honour, Mary Hamilton. There is no truth whatever, I need hardly say, in the sentimental stories in which certain writers have indulged respecting this lady. She seems to have been a somewhat commonplace being, and Peter's particular style of love-making would not appear to have been unsuited to her. My readers are aware that a branch of the great Scotch family of Hamilton, the rival of the house of Douglas, had settled in Russia at a period considerably preceding the emigration of the seventeenth century, and dating from the reign of Ivan the Terrible. This branch, which had married into several of the great families of the country, was almost completely Russianised, before the young Tsar's accession. Mary Hamilton, the granddaughter of Artamon Matviéief, Nathalia Naryshkin's adopted father, went to Court, like other girls of her class, and, being a pretty girl, she shared the usual fate. But

Peter's passion for her was of the most ephemeral description. He forsook her after the shortest acquaintance. She consoled herself with his *Dienshtchiks*, and, several times over, she secretly got rid of the children who were the results of these intimacies. In her desire to keep her hold on one of her faithless lovers, young Orlof,—a very sorry fellow, who ill-treated and fleeced her,—she stole the Tsarina's money and jewels. A mere chance brought about the discovery of these crimes, both small and great. A somewhat important document disappeared from the Tsar's cabinet; suspicion fell on Orlof, who had been aware of its existence, and who had spent the night abroad. When he was brought into the Sovereign's presence, and questioned, he lost his head, fancied that his intercourse with Hamilton was the real object of the enquiry, fell on his knees, crying '*Vinovat*' (pardon), and confessed everything,—both the thefts by which he had profited, and the infanticide at which he had connived. There was a fresh enquiry and a trial. The unhappy girl was convicted, besides her other crimes, (and this last was a mortal one), of having made spiteful remarks about her Sovereign lady, and jokingly referred to the pimples on the imperial countenance. Catherine, whatever her faults may have been, showed considerable kindness on this occasion. She interceded for the culprit, and induced the Tsarina Prascovia, who enjoyed considerable credit, and whose intervention was all the more weighty, because, as a rule, she was little inclined to indulgence, to follow her example. According to ancient Russian ideas, infanticide was a crime which circumstances might easily be held to palliate, and the Tsarina Prascovia was in many respects an old-fashioned Russian. But Peter was inexorable. 'He would not,' he said, 'be either Saul or Ahab, nor violate the Divine Law by an excess of kindness.' Had he then such a mighty respect for Divine Law? My own belief is that he scoffed at it, but—and this, in his eyes, was an unpardonable fault—he fancied himself cheated of several soldiers. After having been put to the question time after time, in the Tsar's own presence, and having steadily refused to give up the name of her accomplice, whose only thought had been to clear himself by casting the guilt on her—he was but a poor creature, that ancestor of the great Catherine's future favourite—Mary Hamilton mounted the scaffold, on the 14th March 1719,

dressed, so Staehlin tells us, 'in a white silk gown, trimmed with black ribbons.' Peter, with his love of theatrical effect, certainly had something to do with this last piece of ghastly coquetry. He was present at the execution, and even,—passive he never could be, anywhere,—had courage to play an active part in it. He embraced the condemned woman at the foot of the scaffold, exhorted her to pray, and supported her in his arms when she bent forward, fainting. Then he stepped aside. When she raised her head, the headsman had taken the Tsar's place. Scherer adds some terrible details to the story. The Tsar, according to him, reappeared when the axe had done its work, and picking up the bloody head, which had rolled into the mud, he calmly began an anatomical discourse, drawing the attention of those present to the number and nature of the organs severed by the steel, especially pointing out the section of the spine. When this was over, he touched the pale lips he had so often kissed before, with his own, let the head drop, crossed himself, and departed.¹

I am not at all inclined to believe that there is any truth in the assertion that Menshikof thought it wise to push on the prosecution and sentence of this unhappy woman, in the interests of his own protectress, the Empress Catherine. This rival never was a dangerous one. A short time afterwards, the Tsarina had much more serious cause for alarm. In one of Campredon's despatches, dated 8th June 1722, the following lines appear:—'The Tsarina fears that if the Princess bears a son, the Tsar may be induced by the Prince of Wallachia to repudiate his wife and marry his mistress.' The mistress in question was Maria Kantémir.²

Prince Dimitri Kantémir, who had been one of Peter's allies during the unfortunate campaign against the Turks in 1711, had lost his sovereignty by the treaty of the Pruth. He had been given hospitality at St. Petersburg, and there waited wearily for the compensation he had been given reason to expect. For a considerable time his daughter appeared more than likely to obtain this for him. When

¹ Siémievski, *Slovo i Dielo*, p. 185. Korobanof, *Study in Russian Antiquities*, 1871, vol. iii. p. 465. Golikof, vol. vi. p. 68. Tatishcheff, Notes on the *Soudiǐbnik* (Code) of Ivan Vassilevitch. Herrmann, *Peter der Grosse und der Tsarevitch Alexei*, p. 207. Mordovtsof, *Russian Women*, p. 57. Scherer, vol. ii. p. 272; the account given by Lubomirski (*Tsar, Archduchesses, etc.*) is a mere work of imagination.

² French Foreign Office.

Peter started for his Persian Campaign in 1722, this love affair had already lasted several years, and seemed to threaten a *dénouement* which might be fatal to Catherine's interests. Both the ladies started with the Tsar, but Maria, who was near her confinement, was obliged to stop at Astrakhan. Her condition increased the confidence felt by her partisans. Since the death of little Peter Petrovitch, in 1719, Catherine had no son whom Peter could make his heir, and it was generally believed that if his mistress bore him one, during this expedition, he would not hesitate to get rid of his second wife, as he had got rid of his first. Catherine's friends, if Scherer is to be believed, took means to avert this danger.¹ When Peter returned, he found his mistress in bed, after a miscarriage, which had seriously threatened her life. Thus Catherine triumphed, and the love affair which had so nearly overthrown her fortune, ended in the same commonplace manner as so many of its predecessors. A short time before the Sovereign's death, a complaisant individual, belonging to the same class as Tchernishof, and Roumiantsof, was found, ready to become the nominal husband of the Princess, who, though still much courted, had forfeited all her ambitious hopes.²

Catherine came victoriously out of all her difficulties, and a solemn coronation finally set her above all attack. The mistress, wife, and sovereign, rehabilitated by marriage, the vigilant guardian of the conjugal hearth, who shared all the honours of the supreme rank, won the day at last, and took her place above the mob of female figures in which we see servant-girls elbowing the daughters of Scotch lairds, and Moldo-Wallachian princesses.

And a yet more unexpected figure now appears in that strange throng—a chaste and respected friend. Yes, even that delicate flower bloomed in the miry slough! The woman who played this part, was that most seductive of all human creatures—a well-born Pole—Slav by her birth, Latin by her education. I have already described Peter as spending long hours in the Gardens of Jaworow in the company of Elizabeth Sieniawska. They built a boat together, rowed on the water, and talked endlessly. It

¹ Vol. iii. p. 259.

² *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 119, etc. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Paris).

was a perfect idyll. This lady, a Lubomirska, who had married a great Court dignitary and eager partisan of Augustus against Leszczyński, flits across the turbulent life of the brutal conqueror, without being assailed by any breath of scandal. It was not so much her beauty,—that was far from remarkable,—which attracted Peter, it was her unusual intelligence. He delighted in her society, he listened to her advice, not always very convenient, for she supported Leszczyński against the Tsar's own *protégé*, and against her husband's master. He talked of his plan for dismissing all the foreign officers in his service; she forthwith taught him a lesson by dismissing the German leader of an orchestra of Polish musicians, which at once gave forth such discordant sounds that even the Tsar's far from sensitive ear suffered. He spoke of turning the provinces, Russian or Polish, through which Charles XII. would have to pass, to reach Moscow, into deserts; and she interrupted him with a story of the gentleman who, to disoblige his wife, had himself made into a eunuch.¹ She was a charming woman, and he was swayed, fascinated and tamed by her charm; he grew nobler in her company, transfigured, as it were, by contact with her pure and delicate, tender, and yet resolute, nature.

V

Women played a large and very varied part in Peter's life. But far more important, from the historical point of view, was the part he himself played in the destinies of Russian women in general. In justice to the great man, this part must be summarily described.

The Tsar Alexis once gave solemn audience, in his castle at Kolomenskoïe, near Moscow, to the ambassador of a foreign power. A murmur of soft voices, and a rustling of silken stuffs, coming from a half-open door, attracted the diplomat's attention. The ceremony was being watched by invisible spectators,—the inhabitants of the mysterious *terem*, driven by curiosity into a sort of semi-violation of their retirement. Suddenly, with a violent push, the door flew open, and a handsome, dark-eyed woman, blushing and confused, with a little boy clinging to her skirts, appeared, and

¹ Staehlin, p. 119, etc.

straightway vanished, to the courtiers' general astonishment and alarm. The dark-haired beauty was the Tsarina Nathalia, and the little three-year old boy, so rough and impetuous already, that heavy doors flew open at his touch, was one day to overthrow the walls of the *terem* itself. In later years, this picturesque scene was taken to be an omen.¹

In the seventeenth century, national feeling in Russia was full of suspicion, almost of hatred, of the weaker sex. This is proved by many popular proverbs of the period: 'A woman's hair is long, but her understanding is short.—A woman's mind is like a house without a roof.—A man should flee a woman's beauty, just as Noah fled the deluge.—A horse must be managed by the bit, and a woman by threats.—The woman who is visible is made of copper, the woman who is invisible is made of gold.'

Modern Russian historians are inclined to hold this peculiarity as one of foreign origin, quite contrary to the natural tendency of the national spirit, which is rather inclined to proclaim the equality of the sexes. As a matter of fact, Russian legislation and the present habits of the country, are altogether opposed to that subjection of women, which still characterises Western laws and customs. A Russian wife, in the absence of any special stipulation in the marriage contract, has the sole control of her fortune. The ideas in vogue before Peter's accession, and the corresponding institutions and habits, including the *terem* itself, were probably of Byzantine origin, the outcome of that great current of monkish and religious asceticism, which left such an indelible mark on the intellectual and moral development of the country. The *terem* was no *harem*. The confinement of women within its walls was the result of a very different sentiment, dictated, not by jealousy, but by the fear of sin and scandal, by a religious conception of human life, according to which the cloistered existence was the ideal one, that which was most pleasing in God's sight. The idea, if not the actual form, of the *terem* was absolutely Byzantine.² This is my theory.

But, however that may have been, the prison was a prison, and a severe one. Women, young girls especially,

¹ Oustrialof, vol. i. pp. 10 and 261.

² Zabielin, *Private Life of the Russian Tsarinas*, p. 83, etc. Kostomarov, *History of Russia*, vol. ii. p. 475.

were mere captives; they vegetated, deprived of light and air, in rooms which were half dungeon and half cell, behind windows covered with thick curtains, and heavily padlocked doors. There was no means of separate exit. The only way of getting out was through the father's or the husband's room, and the father or husband kept the keys in his pocket, or under his pillow. On festival occasions, when the guests were at table and the round '*pirogui*' had made their appearance, the wife of the host stood, for a moment, on the threshold of the women's apartment. Then the men rose and kissed her, but she retired immediately. As for the unmarried daughters, no male eye, not even that of an affianced husband, saw them till they were married. A bride married without ever beholding her husband or being seen by him. A betrothal strongly resembled the game of hot cockles. There was indeed an individual, called the *Smotritchitsa*, generally a relation of the suitor, who inspected the girl, and reported accordingly,—but she only acted for the suitor. No young girl permitted herself to wonder what her future husband might be like. Her father, when he informed her that her marriage was arranged, showed her a whip, fit emblem of the authority he was about to transmit to her husband, and the only glimpse of him she was permitted, before being led to the altar. She went to church in deep silence, covered with a heavy veil; not a gesture, not a word, except to answer the priest, and then only, for the first time, the husband heard her voice. At the repast which followed the ceremony, the couple were separated by a curtain. The bride's conjugal existence did not begin until the first part of the feast was concluded. Then her bridesmaids led her to the nuptial chamber, undressed her, and assisted her to bed. There she waited, till the husband was sufficiently drunk. The groomsmen, when they thought this point attained, led him to the bride's apartment, carrying torches, which they planted round the bed, in barrels filled with wheat, barley, and oats. The bed itself was laid on sheaves of rye. Then came the crucial moment. The bride's face was seen at last. To welcome her new master, she rose from her bed, wrapped herself in a furred robe, went several paces towards him, bending respectfully, and dropped her veil.

A man who may have believed himself to be marrying a

beautiful girl, would sometimes see that she was humpbacked, sickly, or frightfully ugly. Even if the go-between had done her duty conscientiously, there was always the chance of her having been deceived, by the substitution of another girl for the real one; such cases not unfrequently occurred. The husband's only resource, in such an event, was to invite his new-made bride, upon the spot, to rid him of her person by straightway taking the veil. But being, in all probability, far from sober, he did not look too closely, and this fact probably accounts for the habit of making the bridegroom intoxicated on such occasions. He did not realise his misfortune until after the marriage was consummated, and become an accomplished fact.

The result of such marriages may easily be conceived. The chronicles of the scandal-mongers, and the judicial records of the period, teem with information on the subject. Husbands would leave their homes, and take refuge in the peace of the cloister; wives, driven distracted by ill-treatment, would use steel and poison to free themselves from an unendurable yoke. The punishment allotted to such crimes, terrible as it was, did not, as we may judge by the engravings of that period, prevent their frequent occurrence. The guilty woman was buried in the earth up to her waist, and there left till death came to release her. The culprit would sometimes have to wait ten days, before her agony was ended,—tortured all the time by hunger and thirst, and half devoured by worms.¹

All these customs were either connected with, or the direct outcome of, a social condition defined by the *Domostroi*, a code of laws drawn up, if not actually written out, by the Russian pope Sylvester, Ivan the Terrible's chief confidant, during the closing years of his life. Whether the details owed their origin to Tartar, Byzantine,² or native sources, the same indelible mark, the brand of barbarism, was on them all. Woman was sacrificed, and man thereby debased. To amuse themselves in their cloistered loneliness, ladies of the higher ranks dressed themselves up like idols, painted themselves to their very

¹ See illustrations to Korb's book. Also the description given by Weber, in Herrmann's *Peter der Grosse*, p. 98 (Aug. 13th, 1717).

² According to M. Nekrassof (*Origin of the Domostroi*, Moscow, 1872), only portions of the work can be ascribed to Sylvester. The manuscript was not published by Golovastof till 1849.

eyes, and drank to excess. When an Embassy was sent to Copenhagen, in 1630, to negotiate the marriage of Princess Irene, the daughter of the Tsar Michael Féodorovitch, with the Prince of Denmark, the Envoys laid particular stress on the fact that the Tsarevna 'did not drink brandy.' The poorer women, who could not afford to dress up, consoled themselves with drink alone,—and all these wives were the mothers of many children. With this condition of things Peter was resolved to do away. And to have succeeded in that matter, alone, would have covered him with glory.

Before his time, it is true, a steadily widening breach had been made in the old tradition. Alexis' second marriage, with its touch of romance, proves the existence of a new current of ideas and feeling. Nathalia appears beside the husband whom she had won by her own beauty and grace, in a very different position from that of former Tsarinas,—frozen, all of them, into a traditional attitude, shut up in the dreariness of their lofty isolation. She took a certain share in her husband's external occupations. She sometimes went out hunting with him, and she was present at the performances given by foreign actors, drawn thither by Matviéief, under the very walls of the ancient Kreml. She even drove with the Tsar in an open carriage, and thereby almost caused a revolution. Under the rule of Alexis' feeble and sickly successor, the current of freedom ran yet stronger. Féodor's sisters did not fail to take advantage of his weakness, and of the general confusion resulting from it. And then Sophia came into power, and inaugurated an era of feminine government in this stronghold of female slavery.

Peter did more, and better still,—or tried to, at all events. His Ukases with reference to marriage were directed against an abuse of power, and against defects of domestic organization, amongst the lower classes, which had grown intolerable. Until his time, only a few days,—sometimes only a few hours,—had been allowed to elapse between the betrothal and the actual marriage. He decreed an interval of at least six weeks, so as to give the betrothed couple time to make acquaintance. This remedy was, of course, neither absolutely, nor immediately, efficacious. Only a few decades before our own time, according to Mielnikof's novel

'*In the Forests,*' the ancient traditions still survived, and were clung to, in certain circles, with the most unconquerable tenacity. Nevertheless, an immense amount of good was done. According to the laws in existence before Peter's time, the head of the household, father or husband, had absolute power—short of capital punishment, at all events,—over the women of his household, whether wife or daughters. A high-born lady, Princess Saltykof, the sister-in-law of the Tsarina Prascovia, was driven, after a long martyrdom, during which she had been beaten over and over again, and tortured by hunger and by cold, to take refuge in the house of her father, a Dolgorouki. Enquiry proved that she had reached it half dead, and covered with wounds,—yet her husband and tyrant claimed her, and all she could obtain, after a long and weary trial, was leave to bury herself, for the rest of her life, in a cloister.¹ My readers may argue, from this case, as to the condition of things in the lower classes. The strongest resistance of the old Russian party was made on this point. The autocratic and despotic feeling was so profoundly enrooted in the national soul, that Peter himself dared not make any direct attack upon it. Some of the laws, made between March and October 1716, would seem to betoken his approval of the old-fashioned customs; but the new spirit which he bore with him, and spread around him, was so utterly opposed to it, that, by degrees, this iniquitous law fell into disuse, was treated as null and void, and finally disappeared from the written code of the country. The *Svod Zakonov* does not refer to it, and quite latterly, it was utterly abolished, by the Court of Appeal.²

In the upper classes of society, Peter, so to speak, took women by the hand, led them into the circle of common life, whether in private or in general society, and there gave them their own special and well-defined position. He was resolved the feminine element should be present in all future gatherings. He would have women show their beauty, talk, dance, and make music. In December 1704, astounded Moscow witnessed an extraordinary sight. On an occasion of public rejoicing, young girls, scattering flowers, and singing odes, took part in a procession through the public streets.³

¹ Mordovstef, p. 133.

² 1869, Sokolowski trial.

³ Golikof, vol. ii. p. 512.

The Reformer even endeavoured to do as much for his Boyard's daughters, as he was doing for their sons. He would have sent them abroad to complete their education, but he was forced to relinquish this point in face of the parents' fierce opposition. He did his best, at all events, to secure them some teaching, and set the example in his own family. He gave his daughters, Anne and Elizabeth, a French governess. He was occasionally present at their lessons, and took care they should assume a European appearance, and that their dresses and head-coverings should be copied from Parisian fashions. When his sister-in-law Prascovia ventured to criticise these innovations, he told her that 'her house was an asylum for fools and weak-minded persons,' and finally carried her along with him. Tsar Ivan's widow thus ended by personifying a sort of transition type in the history of Russian women, the direct outcome of Peter's reform. She gave her daughters French masters, and she had a German tutor for herself. But she kept her Russian custome, and with it, her savage instincts. She used to beat her maids-of-honour, and one day,—to force one of her servants to plead guilty to some trifling fault,—she poured the bottle of brandy she always kept in her carriage over his head, set it on fire, and then struck the poor wretch with her cane, on the horrible wounds the burning brandy had made.¹

The road before Peter was too long for him to reach the goal he had, doubtless, set before him. And indeed his native coarseness and depravity did not, it must be acknowledged, make him the best of guides. He often forgot himself, lost sight of the real object of his journey,—and such digressions were fatal to his end. He was too apt to behave like a trooper, and a rough one, in the drawing rooms he had called into existence, and before the eyes of the recluses he had released from the bondage of the *terem*. The moral character of Russian women will long bear traces of the strange fashion in which Peter the Great introduced the sex into social life.²

The same reproach must be applied to the whole of the great man's work, and certainly detracts both from its merit

¹ Siémiewski, *The Tsarina Prascovia*, p. 151.

² See M. N——'s study of *Russian Women in the Days of Peter the Great*. *Novosti*, 1872, No. 152.

and his glory. Yet the female world, now-a-days, in its more or less legitimate revolt, not in Russia only, against the injustice and cruelty, real or imaginary, of its fate, must recognise Peter the Great as one of its most effectual saviours, —just as civilization in general must acknowledge him one of its most powerful makers.

Brutal and cynical though he was, woman was more to him than mere beautiful flesh. His conception of her part in the family, and in society, was so high as to approach within measurable distance of our modern ideal. And, even if the woman of whom I am now about to speak had never appeared in his feminine circle, this fact, alone, would atone for many faults.

CHAPTER III

CATHERINE

- I. Her arrival in Russia—The siege of Marienburg—Her origin—Pastor Glück's family—Shérémétief's camp—Menshikof's house—Catherine Troubatshof—*Piétroushka's* mother—The marriage—The servant girl becomes the sovereign.
- II. Contemporary opinion—Baron Von Pöllnitz—The Margravine of Baireuth—Campredon—The portraits in the Romanof Gallery—Neither pretty nor distinguished looking—An active temperament and a well-balanced mind—An officer's wife—Her influence over Peter—She fascinated and tamed him—Their correspondence—Their conjugal intimacy—The Tsarina's share in politics—Her good actions and her faults—Clouds on the domestic horizon.
- III. These clouds are dispersed—The steady rise of Catherine's fortune—The death of Alexis—The mother of the heir—She brings in her family—The Riga postilion—The Revel courtesan—The shoemaker—All of them are given titles—The pinnacle of glory—Catherine's coronation—The succession to the crown—On the edge of the abyss—A criminal intimacy—The Chamberlain Mons—The punishment—Inquiries and threats—A dubious reconciliation—Peter's death—and Catherine's triumph—She does not turn it to the best account—Reign of sixteen months—A Comedy Queen.

I

AT the beginning of the Swedish war, in July 1702, General Shérémétief, whose orders were to occupy Livonia, and take up a strong position in that country, laid siege to Marienburg. The town was reduced, after a few weeks of gallant resistance, to the last extremity, and the commandant resolved to blow himself up with the fortress. He called some of the inhabitants together, and privately warned them of his decision, advising them to decamp forthwith, unless they desired to share his fate, and that of his troops. Amongst the persons thus warned, was the Lutheran pastor of the place. He fled at once, with his wife, his children, and his servant maid, carrying nothing with him but a Slavonic Bible, which he hoped might serve as safe conduct through

the enemy's lines. When he was stopped by the Russian outposts, he brandished his book, proved his linguistic talent by quoting several passages, and offered to serve as an interpreter. The authorities agreed, and undertook to send him to Moscow with his family. But how about the servant girl? Shérémétief had cast an approving eye on her fair and opulent beauty. With a knowing smile, he gave orders that she should stay in camp, where her society would be more than welcome. Peter had not yet thought, as he did later, of forbidding the presence of the fair sex with his armies. The attack was to be made on the morrow, but in the mean time the troops were taking what pleasure they could find. The new comer was soon seated at table, in gay company: she was cheerful, anything but shy, and was received with open arms. A dance was just about to begin, and the hautboys were tuning up. Suddenly, a fearful explosion overthrew the dancers, cut the music short, and left the servant maid, fainting with terror, in the arms of a dragoon. The commandant of Marienburg had kept his word. Thus it was,—to a noise like thunder, and close clasped in a soldier's embrace—that Catherine I. made her first appearance in Russian history.¹

She was not, at that time, called 'Catherine' at all, and no one knows what name she really bore, nor whence she came, nor how she had reached Marienburg. Both as regards her family, and the country of her birth, history and legend are at variance. The only point on which documents, more or less authentic, and traditions, more or less worthy of credit, unite in agreeing, is in a general affirmation that her life and destiny were the most extraordinary to which any woman was ever called—no romance of an empress, some story, rather, out of the *Arabian Nights*. I will try to relate—not the certainties, for there are hardly any certainties—but the most probable facts, in this unique career.

She was born in a Livonian village, whether in Swedish or Polish Livonia, no one knows, some say in that of Vvshki-Oziero, in the neighbourhood of Riga, others, at Ringen,

¹ Weber, *Memoirs of the Reign of the Empress Catherine*, 1728, pp. 605-613; Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 128, etc.; Grot, *Examination of the Origin of the Empress Catherine*, in the *Memoirs of the 'Académie des Sciences' of St. Petersburg*, 1877, vol. xviii.

in the district of Derpt (now known as Iourief).¹ In 1718, on the 11th of October, the anniversary of the capture of Noteburg, a Swedish town, Peter wrote,—‘*Katerinoushka*, greeting! greeting on the occasion of this happy day, on which Russia first set foot on your native soil!’ Yet, Catherine would rather seem to have come of some Polish family. Her brothers and sisters, who appeared on the scene in later years, were called Skovoroshtchenko or Skovorotski, which for the sake of euphony, doubtless, has been turned into Skovronski.² We may suppose these emigrants, as they may have been—mere peasants, in any case—to have fled the yoke of serfdom, grown intolerable in their native land, to seek some less oppressive servitude elsewhere. In 1702, Catherine was seventeen years old, and an orphan. Her mother is believed to have been the serf, and the mistress, of a high-born Livonian named Alvendhal. Of this connection—possibly a very temporary one—Catherine was the fruit. Her legitimate father and mother died, her real father disowned her, and when still a mere child, she was received and sheltered by Pastor Glück. He taught her the catechism, but she did not learn her alphabet. She never could do more, in later years, than just sign her name. She grew up in her protector’s house, making herself useful, as she grew older, sharing the household duties, and taking care of the children. Glück received foreign pupils, and she helped to wait on them; two of these pupils declared, in later years, that she always stinted them in their bread and butter. This instinct of economy never deserted her. In certain other matters, according to some historians, and from a very early age, she was more than liberal. A Lithuanian gentleman of the name of Tiesenhausen, and other lodgers in the pastor’s house, are reported to have enjoyed her favours. She is even said to have brought a girl into the world, who died when only a few months old. Not long before the siege, her master thought it best to put a stop to these irregularities, by finding her a husband. The husband or the betrothed—

¹ A paper was published in Westermann’s *Illustrirte Monatschrift*, in 1857, with the object of proving that Catherine was born at Riga, and belonged to the Badendik family, from which the writer of the paper, Herr Tversen, was descended.

² Arsenief, *Catherine’s Reign*, vol. i. pp. 74, 75. Andréief, *The Representatives of Authority in Russia, after Peter I.* (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 5.

there is some uncertainty on this point—a Swedish Lifeguardsman named Kruse, disappeared after the capture of the town, having been taken prisoner by the Russians, and sent far away, or, according to a better established version, he escaped the catastrophe, having been sent towards Riga, with his regiment, either just before, or just after, the consummation of the marriage. Catherine, after she became Tsarina, sought him out, and gave him a pension.¹

Meanwhile, she was the joy of that portion of the Russian army which was engaged in the Livonian campaign. She began as the mistress of a non-commissioned officer, who beat her, and finally, passed into the possession of the general himself, who soon grew weary of her. The question of how she came into Menshikof's household is one on which opinions vary. Some authorities declare she was first engaged to wash the favourite's shirts. She would seem, in one of her letters to Peter, after she had become his wife, to allude to this fact in her past career: 'Though you doubtless have other laundresses about you, the old one never forgets you.' And Peter answers gallantly, 'You are mistaken, you must be thinking of Shafirof, who mixes up his love affairs with his clean linen. That is not my way, and besides, I am growing old.' One thing is certain, her original position in her new protector's house was a somewhat humble one. When Menshikof wrote, in March 1706, to his own sister Anne, and to the Arsénief sisters, to come and meet him at Witebsk for the Easter festivities, foreseeing that their fear of the bad roads might prevent them from obeying his call, he begged them, at all events, to send him Catherine Troubatshof and two other girls.² This name of Troubatshof may be an allusion to Catherine's husband or betrothed, for the Russian word *Trouba* means *trumpet*.

But an important event had already occurred in the existence of the person thus so unceremoniously disposed of.

¹ Arsénief, Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 240.

² Oustrialof refuses to admit that this letter can refer to the future Tsarina, and appeals to the testimony of Gordon, according to whom the girl bore the name of *Catherine Vasilevna* until it was converted, on her conversion to the Greek Church, into that of Catherine Aléxiéievna, but Peter himself, and other contemporary authorities, give her different and very varied names, in perfectly reliable documents (Oustrialof, vol. iv. part. ii. p. 329. Compare Peter's '*Writings and Correspondence*,' vol. iii. p. 283.

Peter had seen her, and had proved himself far from indifferent to her charms. There are many different stories as to this first meeting. The Tsar, we are told, paid a visit to Menshikof, after the capture of Narva, and was astonished by the air of cleanliness visible in the favourite's person and surroundings. He enquired how he contrived to have his house so well kept, and to wear such fresh and dainty linen. Menshikof's only answer was to open a door, through which the sovereign perceived a handsome girl, aproned, and sponge in hand, bustling from chair to chair, and going from window to window, scrubbing the window panes.¹ The picture is a pleasing one, but I notice one drawback. Narva fell in August 1704, and at that date, Peter had already made Catherine the mother of at least one child. During the month of March, in the following year, she bore him a son, the little *Pietroushka*, of whom Peter speaks in one of his letters. Eight months later, she had two boys.²

These children were certainly dear to the great man, for, he thought of them even among the terrible anxieties which then devoured him. But he does not appear, as yet, to have cared much for their mother. There has been a world of hair-splitting over the circumstances of Catherine's removal from the favourite's household, to that of the Tsar. All sorts of dramatic incidents have been invented. According to one story, the lady, after an agreement between the two friends, and a formal cession of Menshikof's rights to his master, took up her residence in her new home, where her eye shortly fell on certain magnificent jewels. Forthwith, bursting into tears, she addressed her new protector: 'Who put those ornaments here? If they come from *the other one*, I will keep nothing but this little ring; but if they come from you, how could you think I needed them to make me love you?'

In all human probability, matters were arranged after a far simpler fashion. I cannot conceive any such disinterestedness on her part, nor such prodigality on his. This scene, too, is supposed to have occurred at a period when the fair Livonian and her august lover were already bound together by the existence of two children. During the succeeding

¹ *Mémoires et Documents*, vol. i. p. 163 (Paris Foreign Office).

² See letter signed 'Catherine and two others,' Oct. 1705; also see *Writings and Correspondence*, vol. iii. p. 283.

years, I can perceive no evident change in the humble and dubious situation occupied by her in that common harem, where Peter and Menshikof were wont, either turnabout, or together, to take their pleasure. Sometimes she was with the Tsar, and sometimes with the favourite. At St. Petersburg, she lived, with all the other ladies, in Menshikof's house. She was still no more than an obscure and com-
plaisant mistress. Peter had many others, and she never ventured to object. She went so far as to pander willingly to the faults, and even to the infidelities of her female rivals, and made up, by her own unfailing cheerfulness, for their caprices of temper. Thus, slowly, and almost insensibly, she endeared herself to the Sovereign, and above all, she grew into a habit with him. She took root in his heart, entrenched herself there, and ended by making herself indispensable. In 1706, he would seem to have feared, for a moment, that she might slip through his fingers, after the fashion of Anna Mons. He began to consider the drawbacks likely to result from the promiscuity in which, up to that time, he and Menshikof had mingled their pleasures and their rights. I notice a sort of dim uneasiness about him, and pricks of conscience which may have been nothing but hints of unconscious jealousy. He had joked for years over Menshikof's promise to marry Daria Arsénief, and held it null and void. In 1706, he declared it valid and sacred, and wrote to his *alter ego*, 'For God's sake, for my soul's sake, remember your oath and keep it!' ¹

Menshikof set him the example, and Peter followed it, though not till much later. Catherine is, indeed, said to have been united to him, at this time, by a secret marriage. After the year 1709, she never left him, and in Poland and Germany, whither she accompanied the Tsar, she was treated almost like a Sovereign. Two other children, daughters both, had bound her still more closely to her lover. But, officially speaking, she was nothing but a mistress. In January 1708, when Peter departed from Moscow to rejoin his army, and take part in what promised to be a decisive campaign, he left this note behind him: 'If, by God's will, anything should happen to me, let the 3,000 roubles which will be found in Menshikof's house, be given to Catherine Vassilevska and her daughter. *Piter.*' They had not

¹ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 245.

travelled very far beyond the ducat bestowed after their first meeting!¹

How then, and when, did Peter finally decide on the apparently wild and impossible folly of making this woman his legitimate wife and Empress? The resolution is said to have been taken in 1711, after the campaign of the Pruth. Catherine's unfailing devotion, her courage, and her presence of mind at critical moments, had overcome his last hesitation. She conquered him, and he, at the same time, perceived the means by which the choice of such a partner and such a Sovereign might be excused in his subjects' eyes. The intervention of the former servant girl had saved the Russian army and its leader from irreparable disaster, and inextinguishable shame. Peter, if he led her to the altar, and placed the Imperial diadem on her brow, would only be repaying the common debt. And this was clearly expressed in the manifesto he addressed to his own people, and to the whole of Europe.

But here, again, alas! we have nothing but an ingenious hypothesis, contradicted by all the facts and every date. The part played by Catherine on the banks of the Moldavian river, when the Russian army was surrounded by the Turks and the Tartars, dates—if it ever took place at all, and this is very doubtful—somewhere in the month of June 1711; at that moment she had already, for over six months, been publicly acknowledged as Peter's wife. The Tsar's son Alexis, who was then staying in Germany, had heard the news early in May, and had written his stepmother a congratulatory letter.²

The great reformer was not likely to seek more or less valid excuses for any decision or act of his. Later, it is true, —*ten years later*,—on the occasion of Catherine's coronation, he thought fit to recall the already distant memory of the peril she had helped to avert in 1711. But, it may be fairly believed, that his object in so doing was to indicate the sense and bearing of this unusual ceremony, whereby, failing a direct successor to the Crown, he desired to invest her, in a manner, with his inheritance, and to ensure the execution, after his own death, of a will which, in his lifetime, owed no

¹ Russian Archives, 1875, vol. ii. p. 58.

² Oustrialof, vol. vi. p. 312. Juel, *En Rejse til Rusland* (Copenhagen, 1893), p. 422.

account to any one. It was at this moment that the manifesto to which I have already referred was published, and by it Peter condescended to reckon with those who might survive him.

It is my duty to add, that the very fact of this marriage has been denied;¹ but we possess very reliable testimony on the subject, in the shape of a despatch written from Moscow on the 20th February (2nd March) 1712, by Whitworth, the British envoy. 'Yesterday, the Tsar publicly celebrated his marriage with his wife, Catherine Aléxiéievna. Last winter, about two hours before his Czarisch Majesty left Moscow, he summoned the Empress Dowager, his sister the Tsarevna Nathalia, and two other half-sisters, to whom he declared this lady to be his empress, and that they should pay her the respect due to that quality, and in case any misfortune might happen to him in the campaign, should allow her the same rank, privileges, and revenue as was usual to the other dowagers, for that she was his real wife, though he had not the time to perform the ceremonies according to the custom of his country, which should be done at the first opportunity. The preparations have been making for four or five days, and on the 18th Mons. Kykin, a Lord of the Admiralty, and Adjutant-General Iagusinski, two persons in a good degree of favour, were sent about to invite the company to his Majesty's *old wedding* (for these were the terms they were ordered to use). 'The Tsar was married in his quality of rear-admiral, and for that reason, not his Ministers and nobility, but his sea officers, had the chief employments, the Vice-Admiral Cruys and the rear-admiral of the galleys being the bridegroom's fathers, and the Empress Dowager, with the vice-admiral's lady, were the bride's mothers. The bridesmaids were two of the Empress Catherine's own daughters, one above five, and the other three years old. The wedding was performed privately, at seven o'clock in the morning, in a little chapel belonging to Prince Menshikof, where no one assisted but those who were obliged to do it through their offices.'²

In spite of this, Whitworth tells us that in the course of the day, there was a great reception at the Palace, a State dinner, a ball, and a display of fireworks. And the Dutch Resident, De Bie, mentions an entertainment given in honour

¹ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 38.

² London Records Office

of the occasion by Prince Menshikof.¹ Thus the event was marked by a certain amount of publicity. Peter's motives, and the progressive course of ideas and sentiments which led up to the extraordinary *dénouement* of this *liaison*, would seem to me clearly proved by a comparison of the English Minister's despatch with those I have already quoted. His evident desire was to ensure the future of his partner and his children, and his duty in this respect appeared to him clearer and more pressing, in proportion, doubtless, to the increase of his affection for his children, and his tenderness and regard for her. Before the campaigns of 1708 and 1711, he simply endeavoured to set things in order, and clear his own conscience, without any regard to the effect his action might produce. In the first instance, a gift of 3000 roubles appeared to him sufficient; in the second, he thought it right to ensure Catherine the benefits of a reputed marriage. Finally, feeling himself bound, in honour,—but not until another year had passed away, and until, probably, he had undergone some pressure both from Catherine herself and from some of the persons cognisant of the circumstances of this domestic drama, among whom, doubtless, the *ci-devant* Livonian peasant had made herself a certain number of friends,—he kept his word, without, however, surrounding the event with any remarkable lustre or display.

It may be objected that as no ecclesiastical authority had broken Peter's first marriage with Eudoxia, and as the ex-Tsarina was still alive, this second alliance was radically void. I fully admit it; but Catherine was accepted, none the less, as a legally married woman. Let us pass on to what her contemporaries thought and said of the new Empress.

II

Baron Von Pöllnitz, who saw her in 1717, thus describes her:—'The Tsarina was in the prime of life, and showed no signs of having possessed beauty. She was tall and strong, exceedingly dark, and would have seemed darker but for the rouge and whitening with which she covered her face. There was nothing unpleasant about her manners, and any one who remembered the princess's origin would have been disposed

¹ Despatch, dated March 5th, 1712 (Archives at the Hague).

to think them good. There is no doubt that if she had had any sensible person about her she would have improved herself, for she had a great desire to do well. But hardly anything more ridiculous than the ladies of her Court can well be imagined. It was said that the Tsar, a most extraordinary prince, had taken pleasure in choosing out these persons, so as to mortify other ladies of his Court more worthy to fill such offices. . . . It might fairly be said that if this princess had not all the charms of her sex she had all its gentleness. . . . During her visit to Berlin, she showed the queen the greatest deference, and let it be understood that her own extraordinary fortune did not make her forget the difference between that princess and herself.'

The Margravine of Baireuth, whose recollections date from a year later, shows, as might be expected, less good nature :

'The Tsarina was short and huddled up, very much tanned, and quite devoid of dignity or grace. The very sight of her proved her low birth. She was muffled up in her clothes like a German comedy actress. Her gown had been bought in some old clothes' shop, it was very old-fashioned, covered with heavy silver embroidery, and with dirt. The front of her skirt was adorned with jewels, the design was very peculiar. It was a double eagle, the feathers of which were covered with tiny diamonds. She had a dozen orders, and as many portraits of saints and relics, fastened all along the facings of her dress, so that when she walked she jingled like a mule.'

But the Margravine was a perfect viper.

Campredon, who is by no means over-disposed to indulgence, acknowledges the Tsarina's political instinct and insight. Whether or not she saved the army, in the campaign of the Pruth, she certainly served it well during the Persian expedition. The story, as told by the French Minister, is not very flattering to Peter. During the great summer heats, the Tsar gave his troops orders to march, and would then go to sleep himself. When he woke, he found that not a man had moved, and when he asked what general had dared to countermand his orders: 'I did it,' said the princess, coming forward, 'because your men would have died of heat and of thirst.'¹

¹ January 6th, 1723.

I have already said that the portraits of Catherine, preserved in the Romanof Gallery in the Winter Palace, give no indication of the physical charms which made her fortune. They betray no sign either of beauty or distinction. The face is large, and round, and common; the nose hideously turned up. She has goggle eyes, an opulent bust, and all the general appearance of a servant girl in a German inn. The sight of her shoes, which are piously preserved at Peterhof, was to inspire the Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier with the reflection that the Tsarina's earthly life had been spent 'on a good footing.'¹ The secret of her success must be sought elsewhere. This coarse-looking, and, to us, unattractive woman, possessed a physical organisation, as robust and indifferent to fatigue as Peter's own, and a moral temperament far better balanced than the Tsar's. Between 1704 and 1723 she bore the lover, who ultimately became her husband, eleven children, most of whom died in infancy. Yet her physical condition scarcely affected her exterior life, and never prevented her from following the Sovereign whithersoever he went. She was a typical officer's wife—*Pahodnaïa Ofitserskaïa jéna*, is the Russian expression—well able to go on active service, lie on the hard ground, live in a tent, and make double or treble stages on horseback. On the Persian campaign she shaved her head, and wore a grenadier's cap. She would review the troops; she would pass down the ranks, before a battle, dropping cheering words, and bestowing bumpers of brandy. A bullet struck one of the men in close attendance on her, but she never blenched.² When, after Peter's death, the town of Revel was threatened by the allied squadrons of England and of Denmark, she would herself have embarked on one of her warships to drive them back.

She was not devoid of vanity; she dyed her fair hair black, to increase the brilliancy of her high-coloured complexion. She forbade the ladies of her court to copy her dresses; she was a beautiful dancer, a first-class performer of the most complicated pirouettes, especially when the Tsar himself was her partner. With others she generally contented herself with walking through her steps. She was a mixture of subtle womanliness, and of almost masculine

¹ *Reminiscences*, 1862, p. 340.

² Pylaief, *The Forgotten Past*, p. 441. *Mémoires et Documents* (Paris Foreign Office), vol. ii. p. 119.

activity. She could make herself most amiable to those who approached her, and she knew how to control Peter's savage outbreaks. Her low extraction caused her no embarrassment. She never forgot it, and frequently spoke of it to those who had known her before her elevation,—to a German tutor, who had been employed by Glück when she had been a servant in the pastor's house,¹ and to Whitworth,—who may indeed have been carried away by vanity when he insinuates that he had been in her closest intimacy, but whom she certainly invited one day to dance with her, enquiring whether he had not 'forgotten the *Katiérinoushka* of former days.'²

The very considerable influence which she exercised over her husband was partly due,—according to contemporary opinion,—to her power of calming his fits of nervous irritation, which were always attended by excruciating headaches. At such moments the Tsar would pass alternately from a state of prostration to one of fury, not far removed from downright madness, and every one fled his presence. Catherine would approach him fearlessly, address him in a language of her own, half tender and half commanding, and her very voice seemed to calm him. Then she would take his head, and caress it tenderly, passing her fingers through his hair. Soon he grew drowsy, and slept, leaning against her breast. For two or three hours she would sit motionless, waiting for the cure slumber always brought him. He always woke cheerful and refreshed.

She endeavoured to curtail the excesses of all sorts, the night orgies and drinking bouts, to which he was addicted. In September, 1724, the launch of a new ship was, as usual, made the pretext for an endless banquet. She went to the door of the cabin in which Peter had shut himself up to drink undisturbed with his boon companions, and called out, '*Pora domoï, batioushka!*' (it is time to come home, little father), he obeyed, and departed with her.³

She would appear to have been full of real affection and devotion, although the somewhat theatrical manifestation of her grief after the great man's death, cast a certain doubt on her sincerity. Villebois mentions two Englishmen, who went every day for six weeks to watch the Tsarina in the chapel

¹ Coxe, *Travels*, 1785, vol. i. p. 511.

² Whitworth, *An Account of Russia* (London, 1771), preface, p. xx.

³ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. p. 492.

where the corpse of the Tsar was laid in state; and he declared the sight touched his own feelings like a performance of the *Andromache*. This sorrow did not prevent the Tsarina from claiming her right to inherit from the Tsar, with the utmost vigour, and the most absolute presence of mind. Peter's affection is less dubious. It may have been coarse in fibre, but there is no doubt about its strength. His letters to Catherine, on the rare occasions when they were separated, express the deep attachment of the 'old fellow,' as he was pleased to call himself, for his *Katiérinoushka*—for the friend of his heart (*drouh serdeshnioukiï*) (*sic*), for the mother of his dear *Shishenka* (the little Peter) with most evident sincerity. Their usual tone is cheery and even joking. There are no fine sentences, nothing but heartfelt words; no passion, much tenderness; no blazing heat, a gentle, equal warmth, never a discordant note, and always a longing to return, on the first opportunity, to the beloved wife, and, yet more, to the friend and companion, in whose society he feels so happy. He is longing to get back to her, he writes in 1708, 'because he is dull without her, and there is nobody to take care of his shirts.' Her answer expresses her conviction that his hair must be very ill-combed in her absence. He answers that she has guessed aright, but that if she will only come he will find some old comb or other with which to put things in order, and meanwhile he sends her a lock of his hair. Frequently, as in former years, his letters were accompanied by gifts. In 1711, there is a watch bought at Dresden; in 1717, lace from Mechlin; on another occasion, a fox and two pairs of doves sent from the Gulf of Finland; writing from Kronstadt in 1723, he apologises, on the score that he has no money, for sending her nothing. While passing through Antwerp, he sends a packet covered with seals, and addressed to *Her Majesty, the Tsarina Catherine Alexiévna*. When the box was opened, all *Shishenka's* mother found in it was a slip of paper with these words written in capital letters: 'April 1st, 1717!' Catherine too would occasionally send trifling gifts, such as fruit, or a warm waistcoat. In 1719, one of Peter's letters closes with the expression of a hope that this summer will be the last they will have to spend apart. Some time after, he sends her a bunch of dried flowers, and a newspaper cutting, containing an account of

an aged couple, a husband who had reached the age of 126 years, and a wife only a year younger. In 1724, the Tsar, arriving in St. Petersburg in the summer season, and finding that Catherine had gone to one of his many country houses, forthwith sent a yacht to bring her back, and wrote, 'When I went into my rooms, and found them deserted, I felt as if I must rush away at once. It is all so empty without thee!'

His absence would seem to have affected her to the same extent. Princess Galitzin, who was in attendance on her at Revel, in July 1714, addresses the following expressive note to the Sovereign:—'Sire, my dear *Batioushka*, we long for your return at the earliest possible moment, and truly, if your Majesty delays much longer, my life will grow very hard. The Tsarina will never deign to fall asleep before three o'clock in the morning, and I never leave her Majesty, and Kirillovna stands beside her bed and dozes. From time to time the Tsarina condescends to say, "Art thou asleep, *Tičtonshka?*" (little aunt), she answers, "No, I'm not asleep, I'm looking at my slippers," and Maïa comes and goes in the room, and makes her bed in the middle of the room, and Matréna walks about the rooms, and squabbles with everybody, and Krestianovna stands behind the chair and looks at the Tsarina. Thy return will release me from the sleeping chamber.'¹

The only letters belonging to the first period of the *liaison*, which have been preserved, are those addressed by the Sovereign, in common, to Catherine and to Anisia Kirillovna Tolstoï, on whom he bestowed the nickname of 'Aunt,' Catherine he called 'Mother.' He wrote the Dutch word *Muder*, in Russian characters. Catherine kept that nickname till 1711, after which Peter speaks of her in more and more familiar, affectionate, and personal terms; *Katiérinoushka*, *Herzensfreundchen*, etc. She did not venture, until much later, to imitate him in this respect. She called him 'Your Majesty' until 1718, and then he too becomes her *Herzensfreundchen*, her *Batioushka*, or simply *mein Freund* (my friend). On one occasion she even goes so far as to imitate his waggish ways, and address her letter, in German, to 'His Excellency, the very illustrious and very eminent Prince-General, Inspector-General, and Knight of the crowned Compass and Axe.'

¹ Peter's Cabinet papers, portfolio ii. No. 20.

This correspondence never has been, and never can be, published in its integrity. Certain portions of it are far too coarse. Peter unscrupulously indulged in obscenities of thought and language, which are quite impossible in print; and Catherine followed his example with an air of the most perfect unconcern. 'If you were with me here,' she writes during one of his absences, 'there would very soon be another *Shishenka!*' This is the general tone of the correspondence, but its actual expression is frequently far less modest.¹

In 1724, when Peter was celebrating the anniversary of his marriage at Moscow, he himself composed the set piece of fireworks, to be lighted under the Empress's windows. This displayed his cypher and hers entwined, within a heart, surmounted by a crown, and surrounded by emblems of love. A winged figure, intended to represent Cupid, bearing a torch and all his other symbols, except the bandage across the eyes, shot across the darkness, and ignited the rockets. The special Cupid which would seem to have habitually presided over the intercourse of these two lovers, was a wingless one. But commonplace, and even debased, as their affection would occasionally appear, it still has certain sympathetic and touching qualities. It is replete with artless, full-flavoured good nature. After the Peace of Nystadt, Peter joked his wife about her Livonian origin, saying, 'According to the terms of this treaty, I am to return all prisoners to the King of Sweden; I don't know what is to become of thee?' She kissed his hand and answered: 'I am your servant, do with me as you will, yet I do not think you are inclined to send me back.' 'I will try,' he replied, 'to settle it with the King!'² This anecdote may not be absolutely true, but it certainly typifies the real nature of their relations. Yet there seems to have been some slyness, and a certain amount of feminine cunning, about Catherine. We are assured that when she was staying at Riga with the Tsar, she contrived to show him an old parchment, drawn from the archives of the town, containing a prophecy that the Russians would never have possession of that country until a most improbable event—a marriage between a Tsar and a Livonian—had taken place. Often too, as

¹ See Siémiewski, *The Empress Catherine*, p. 89. Brückner, *Peter's d. Grossen Briefwechsel mit Catharina* (Raumers Taschenbuch, 5th Series).

² Oustrialof, vol. iv. p. 132.

I notice, she would draw his attention to the fact that success never came to him until he knew her, whereas, since that event, he had gone from victory to victory. This was firm, historical ground, and the fact was much more likely to impress the Tsar's sturdy mind, than the prophecy above referred to.

He had no desire, indeed, to send back the prisoner he had taken at Marienburg. In a thousand ways, she made herself agreeable, useful, indispensable. As in past years, she watched her lord's amorous caprices with a vigilant, though far from jealous, eye, solely desirous of staving off too serious consequences, always interposing at the right moment. Nar-tof tells the story of a fellow country-woman of Catherine's, a laundress belonging to Narva, whose attraction for the Sovereign took on alarming proportions. Peter, to his astonishment, beheld the girl, one day, in the Tsarina's room. He pretended not to recognise her, and enquired whence she came. Catherine calmly replied, 'I heard so much of her beauty and of her wit, that I made up my mind to take her into my service, without consulting you.' The Tsar was dumb, and turned his attention to quite a different quarter.

Catherine never aspired to interfering in State affairs, she had no taste for intrigue. 'As for the Tsarina,' writes Campredon, in 1721, 'although the Tsar is most attentive to her, and is full of tenderness for the Princesses, her daughters, she has no power as regards public business, in which she never interferes. She applies herself solely to keeping the Tsar's good graces, to restraining him, to the best of her ability, from those drinking and other excesses which have greatly weakened his health, and to calming his anger when it seems ready to break forth against any particular person.'

Her intervention in the catastrophe on the Pruth, if it ever did occur, was quite an isolated case. Her correspondence with her husband proves, that though she was aware of his anxieties, her information was of a very general nature. He writes to her about trifling commissions, such as buying wine or cheese, which he desires to give away, or the engagement of foreign artists or artisans. His tone is frequently very confidential, but he keeps to generalities, and very seldom enters into detail. In 1712, he writes: 'We are well, thank God, but it is a hard life; I cannot do much with my left hand, and my right has to hold sword and pen at once. Now thou knowest on how many persons I can reckon for help.'

She took a line, and assumed an office, her choice of which proves that this peasant-born woman had a most wonderful and instinctive comprehension of her true position. There is a hint of this, in the French diplomatic document which I have just quoted. She realised that,—beside the great Reformer playing out his part as a merciless judge, to the bitter end,—there was another accessory and necessary *rôle*, instinct with pity and mercy, to which she, the humble serf, who had sounded every depth of human misery, was clearly called. She saw that if she did this work, if she strove to win pardon for others, her own sudden elevation would be more willingly forgiven her; and that if, amidst the spite and hatred raised against the Tsar by the violent nature of his reforms, she could gather a circle of grateful sympathy round her own person, she might one day, if some change of fortune overtook her, find in it a protection and a welcome shelter. She came to need it, and did thus find a shelter, and more than a shelter, after Peter's death.

Like Lefort, in the old days, but with infinitely more consistency and tact, she constantly interposed in the sanguinary conflict which the Tsar's chosen work had roused between himself and his subjects;—a conflict marked by the daily use of the axe, the gallows, and the knout. Peter was occasionally reduced to concealing the punishments he decreed from his wife's knowledge. Unfortunately, as it would seem, she did not continue satisfied with the distant and ultimate reward this line of conduct promised. She began, after a time, to seek for more immediate profit. She grew to imagine, or she was made to believe, that she must settle her fortunes on a firm financial basis. She was convinced, or allowed herself to be persuaded, that the day would come when she would need money—and a great deal of money—to pay for necessary co-operation, or anticipate probable failure. And then she began to fleece all those who sought her protection. Any one who desired to escape exile or death, through her intervention, was forced to open his purse. Thus she amassed large sums, which, after Menshikof's example, and probably by his advice, she invested, under assumed names, at Amsterdam and Hamburg. This intrigue soon attracted Peter's attention, and his discovery of it was probably not unconnected with the clouds that darkened the close of their conjugal existence. In 1718, Catherine undertook to save Prince

Gagarin, the Governor-General of Siberia, who had been found guilty of enormous peculations, from the gallows. He paid her considerable sums, part of which were employed in corrupting Prince Volkonski, to whom the enquiry had been entrusted,—a scarred old soldier, who, in spite of his glorious career, was not proof against such vile temptations. When Volkonski was arrested, he defended himself by alleging that he had not dared to repulse the Tsarina's advances, for fear of making a quarrel between her and the Tsar. To this, Peter is said to have made the following characteristic reply: 'Idiot! you would have made no quarrel between us! I should only have given my wife a sound conjugal punishment. She will get it now, and you will be hung!'¹

III

The tragic close of the quarrel between the Tsar and his eldest son was, to the stepmother of the unhappy Prince, a crowning victory, a sudden impulse towards the giddiest heights of destiny. She has been accused, and not unnaturally, of having had a more or less direct share in bringing about this *dénouement*. To this point I shall have to refer in a later chapter. It was her own son who thus became heir presumptive to the throne, and another bond was forged between herself and the father of the boy. She even succeeded, to a certain extent, in forcing her family, obscure Lithuanian serfs, upon the Tsar. Chance is reported to have helped her in this matter. A postillion, working on the road, between St. Petersburg and Riga, having been ill-treated by a traveller, loudly complained, and affirmed his close connection with persons in the highest quarters. He was arrested, and the facts laid before the Tsar, who ordered enquiry to be made, and found himself unexpectedly enriched with a whole tribe of brothers and sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces, whom Catherine had somewhat too easily forgotten. The postillion, Féodor Skovronski, was her eldest brother. He had married a peasant woman, by whom he had three sons and three daughters. Another brother, still a bachelor, worked in the fields. The eldest sister was called Catherine, —the second, who had been raised to the throne under that

¹ Dolgoroukof's *Memoirs*, vol. i. p. 31.

name, had formerly been known as Martha. The real Catherine, it was said, lived at Revel, and there carried on a shameful trade. A third sister, Anne, was the wife of an honest serf, Michael-Joachim, a fourth had married a freed peasant, Simon-Henry, who had settled at Revel, and worked as a shoemaker.

Peter caused the postillion to be brought to St. Petersburg, confronted him with his sister, in the house of a *dienshtchik*, named Shépiélof, and when his identity had been established, gave him a pension, and sent him back to the country. He took measures to ensure a modest competence to each member of the family, and made a bargain that he was to hear no more of them. The Revel sister-in-law, who was too compromising to be endured, was put under lock and key. Catherine had to wait for the Tsar's death, before she could do anything more for her own people. When that occurred, the ex-postillion, the ex-shoemaker, and all the other peasants, male and female, appeared at St. Petersburg, disguised under new names and titles, and dressed in court apparel. Simon-Henry became Count Simon Léontiévitch Hendrikof, Michael-Joachim was called Count Michael Efimovitch Efimovski, and so with the rest. All were given large fortunes.¹ A Count Skovronski made a great figure in the reign of Elizabeth, and married his daughter to a Prince Sapieha, a member of an illustrious Polish family, well known in France.

But meanwhile, Catherine's fortunes rose steadily higher. A collective vote of the Senate and the Synod, given on the 23rd of December 1728, endowed her with the title of Empress. Two years later, Peter himself decided on the formal coronation of the *ci-devant* servant girl. This ceremony was quite a novel one in Russia, and surrounding circumstances imparted considerable importance to it. The history of the country only furnishes one precedent for such a step—the coronation of Marina Mniszech just before her marriage with Dimitri. But the object, in that case, was to give a kind of presumptive consecration to the rights of the haughty daughter of the Polish magnate, imposed on the Russian nation by the victorious policy of the Waza. Dimitri, who was supported by the armies of the Republic, merely as, and because he was, Marina's husband, took quite

¹ Karnovitch, *Great Russian Fortunes*, p. 179.

a secondary place. Since those days, no Tsarina had been more than the Tsar's wife, none had ever received any political investiture or prerogative. But the death, in 1719, of the sole heir to the crown, had raised the question of the succession. During the following years it was constantly to the front. When, in 1721, the Peace of Nystadt conferred some leisure on the Sovereign, this question became, for a time, his chief anxiety. Shafirof and Ostermann, in obedience to his commands, held several private conferences with Campredon, in the course of which they proposed an alliance with France, based on a guarantee as to the succession to the Russian throne to be given by the French king. For whose benefit? Campredon imagined Peter had chosen his eldest daughter, whom he was supposed to intend to marry to one of his subjects and near relations,—probably to a Naryshkin. This opinion was confirmed by Shafirof.¹ The most varied suppositions on the subject were current amongst the general public, up to the period of the coronation. The novel nature of that event seemed, in the eyes of the majority, to settle the question in Catherine's favour. This idea was finally shared by Campredon himself.²

The crown, which was specially ordered for the occasion, was far more magnificent than any used by former Tsars. It was adorned with diamonds and pearls; there was an enormous ruby on the top; it weighed four pounds, and was valued at one and a half millions of roubles. It was made at St. Petersburg, by a Russian jeweller, but the new capital was quite unequal to supplying the Tsarina's dress. This was sent from Paris, and cost 4000 roubles. Peter himself set the crown on his wife's head. Catherine knelt before the altar, weeping, and would have embraced the Tsar's knees. He raised her smilingly, and invested her with the orb, the symbol of sovereignty (*dierjava*). But he kept the sceptre, the token of power, in his own hand. When the Tsarina left the church, she entered a coach, sent, like her dress, from Paris, richly gilt and painted, and surmounted by an Imperial crown.³

This ceremony was performed on the 7th—10th—May. Just six months later, an event took place in the Winter Palace, which set the Tsarina, crowned and anointed

¹ Campredon's Despatches, Oct. 29, Nov. 17 and 21, 1721 (French Foreign Office).

² Despatch, dated May 26th, 1724.

³ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xxii. pp. 447, 463. Golikof, vol. x. p. 64.

as she was, on the very brink of a precipice. Peter, on his return from an excursion to Revel, received warning of a suspicious intimacy which had existed for some time between Catherine and one of her chamberlains. It is curious that this warning should not have reached him sooner, for the Tsarina's *liason* with young William Mons had, according to reliable witnesses, long been in public knowledge.¹ Peter might easily have gathered this fact from a secret examination of the chamberlain's correspondence. He would have found letters signed by the greatest persons in the country, Ministers, ambassadors, and even bishops, who all addressed the young man in terms which clearly indicated the place they believed him to hold in the imperial household.² But the inquisitorial policy of the great Tsar had begun to bear its final fruit,—the consequence and penalty of the excess to which it had been carried. Universal espionage had engendered universal watchfulness against possible spies. Men did as they were done by, and Peter paid for his too great eagerness to know the secrets of other houses, by being left in ignorance of what was occurring in his own.

Mons was the brother of Peter's former mistress. He was one of that race of bold and successful adventurers of whom, so far as Russia was concerned, Lefort was the historical ancestor. His education was of the most scanty description, but he was intelligent, shrewd, a gay companion, and, occasionally, something of a poet. He was very superstitious, and wore four rings: one of pure gold, one of lead, one of iron, and the last of copper. These were his talismans, and the gold ring stood for love. One of his sisters, Matr na, had married F odor Nikolai vitch Balk, who belonged to a branch of the ancient Livonian house of the Balken, which had been settled in Russia since 1650. This Balk held the rank of Major-General, and was Governor of Riga, and his wife, who had gained great favour with Catherine, had been one of her ladies of honour and her closest confidant, ever since the coronation. Matr na looked after her brother's interests, and arranged the meetings between the lovers. Nor was this all. She had contrived, with the assistance of Anna F odorovna Ioushkof, another great favourite of the Tsarina's, of Princess Anne of Courland, and of some

¹ Campredon's Despatch, Dec. 9th, 1724 (Paris Foreign Office).

² Si mievski, *The Empress Catherine*, p. 109.

other ladies, to set up a kind of camarilla, and little by little the Tsar had been hemmed in with moving quicksands of jobbery and intrigue, of hidden influences, and obscure machinations. Weakened as he was by illness, and harried by haunting suspicion, his actions were literally paralysed. William Mons was the soul of this circle, and himself took a woman's name to veil his correspondence with a certain lady named Soltykof, who was one of its members.¹

Female government was already beginning to take up its place in Russia.

Peter's powers, both as judge and as inquisitor, failed him here, completely and simultaneously. He long remained in ignorance of what he ought to have known, and even when he was warned, he could not strike, and mete out just punishment for the most unpardonable offence which could have been offered him. The first intimation reached him from an anonymous source. A long-prepared trap was laid, so some people assert. Catherine is supposed to have dallied, one lovely moonlight night, within an arbour in her garden, before which Matr na Balk mounted guard, and there Peter discovered her.² I regret to have to point out that this summer scene is at variance with the season of the year imposed by historical accuracy,—the month of November, and, in all probability, at least twenty degrees of frost. According to official documents, Peter learnt the fact on the 5th of November. The informer, a subordinate of Mons, who was quickly discovered, was at once arrested. The Tsar held a hasty enquiry in the torture-chamber of the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, but, contrary to the general expectation, he failed to act with his usual lightning rapidity. Though both his honour and his life were affected,—for the informer had spoken of a plot, and intended attempt on his life,—he seemed to hesitate. He concealed his rage. It almost looked as though this man,—impatient and impulsive beyond all others, as a rule,—were seeking to gain time. On the 20th of November, he returned to the palace without a sign of perturbation on his countenance, supped as usual with the Empress, and held a long and familiar conversation with Mons, who, like everyone else, felt quite reassured. At a somewhat early hour he complained of weariness and enquired the hour. Catherine

¹ Mordovtsef, p. 130.

² Scherer, vol. iv. p. 78.

consulted her repeating watch—the one he had sent her from Dresden—and replied, ‘Nine o’clock.’ With a sudden flash of anger—his first—he took the watch, opened the case, gave the hands three turns, and, in the well-known tone which no one ever dared to answer, he replied, ‘You are quite mistaken! It is midnight, and every one will go to bed!’

The lion was awake again, with his mighty roar and cruel claws,—the tyrant who claimed to rule every one and everything, and even time itself!

The company separated, and, a few moments later, Mons was arrested in his own room, Peter himself, so we are told, acting as his jailor and his examining judge. But throughout all the examination, Catherine’s name was never mentioned. He deliberately put her outside the question. The enquiry resulted in the culprit’s conviction of other guilty practices,—of abuse of influence and criminal traffic, in which *Matréna Balk* was also involved. For two successive days, on the 13th and 14th of November, a crier passed through the streets of St. Petersburg, calling upon all those persons who had paid bribes to declare them, under pain of the most heavy punishment. But Mons himself gave full information. In later years, he was described, like *Glebof*, as having stoically poured forth every other sort of avowal, in his desire to protect his mistress’s honour. Such heroism, had it really existed, can scarcely have been of the finest temper. Even in Peter’s reign, there was less risk for the man who acknowledged embezzlement, than for him who posed as the Tsar’s rival in love. This fact had been proved by *Glebof*’s terrible end, and *William*, handsome as he was, seems to have had nothing of the hero about him. According to the minutes of the official enquiry, he fainted away as soon as he was arrested and brought into the Tsar’s presence, and he ended by confessing whatever he was desired to confess. There cannot possibly have been any difficulty about drawing information from him, for, as we are significantly informed, he was never put to the question. As for *Matréna Balk*, she made some resistance at first, but the first blow from the knout quite broke it down.

Mons was beheaded on the 28th of November, 1724. The Saxon Resident in St. Petersburg declares that, before the execution, Peter went to see him, and expressed his great

regret at being obliged to part with him. The young man went bravely to the scaffold. The great Tsar's reign, like another and later reign of terror, at all events taught men how to die. The story that the guilty man begged his executioner to take a miniature framed in diamonds from his pocket, to destroy the picture (Catherine's portrait) and to keep the setting, is an evident and clumsy invention.¹ We may take it for certain that prisoners, in those days, were searched within their prisons. Matréná Balk was given eleven blows with the knout, did not die under them (which proves that she was tough), was sent for life to Siberia, and returned after Peter's death. Nothing was perpetual at that period. Once a culprit escaped with life, he or she had a fair chance of rising again, even out of the darkest depths. Around the place of execution, placards, bearing the names of all the persons with whom Mons and his sister had done business, were fixed on posts. The whole hierarchy of Russian official life, headed by the High Chancellor Golovkin, was there represented, coupled with the names of Prince Menshikof, the Duke of Holstein, and the Tsarina Prascovia Féodorovna.²

Catherine behaved, all through this ordeal, with a courage which is almost terrifying. On the day of the execution, she affected the greatest cheerfulness. In the evening, she sent for the princesses, summoned their dancing-master, and practised the minuet with them. But in one of Campredon's despatches I find these words: 'Although the Princess hides her grief, as far as that is possible, it is clearly written on her countenance . . . so much so that all the world wonders what is going to happen to her.'³

On that very day, she had a somewhat disagreeable surprise. A ukase written by the Tsar's own hand, and addressed to all the Administrative Bodies, forbade them, in consequence of the abuses which had arisen *without the Tsarina's knowledge*, to obey any order or recommendation of hers in future. At the same time the offices through which her private affairs were directed, were laid under an interdict; her fortune was taken from her, under pretext of its being managed for her, and she found herself so pinched for money, that when she wanted to give a thousand ducats to a

¹ Crusenstolpe, *Der Russische Hof* (Hamburg, 1857), p. 68.

² Mordovtsef, pp. 48, 49. ³ St. Petersburg, Dec. 9th, 1724 (Foreign Office).

dienshtchik, named Vassili Pétrovitch, who was in possession, for the moment, of the Tsar's ear, she was obliged to borrow it from her ladies.¹

And the next day brought her fresh misery. The Tsar, we are told, took his wife out with him in a sledge, and the Imperial couple were seen to pass close to the scaffold on which Mons' corpse still lay exposed. The Tsarina's dress brushed the dead body. Catherine never turned her head nor ceased to smile. Then Peter went further. The dead man's head, enclosed in a vessel of spirits of wine, was placed in a prominent position in the empress' apartment. Catherine endured its horrible proximity, and preserved her apparent calm. In vain the Tsar raged. He broke a magnificent Venetian glass with his fist, saying,—‘Thus will I treat thee and thine!’ She answered, quite unmoved, ‘You have destroyed one of the chief ornaments of your dwelling. Do you think you have increased its charm?’ She contrived thus to subdue and control him, but their relations continued strained. On the 19th of December, 1724, Lefort wrote in a despatch, ‘They hardly speak to each other; they no longer eat nor sleep together.’ And at the same time, public attention was generally attracted to Maria Kantémir. Peter was with her every day. Then it was, so the world believed, that he learned the truth of what had happened at Astrakhan, where, as my readers will recollect, the hopes of the Princess, and, it may be, of her lover as well, had been overthrown by a mysterious miscarriage. The doctor who had attended the young girl, a Greek named Palikala, had been bribed; ‘By whose hand?’ he enquired—and the answer rose of itself to the outraged husband's lips.

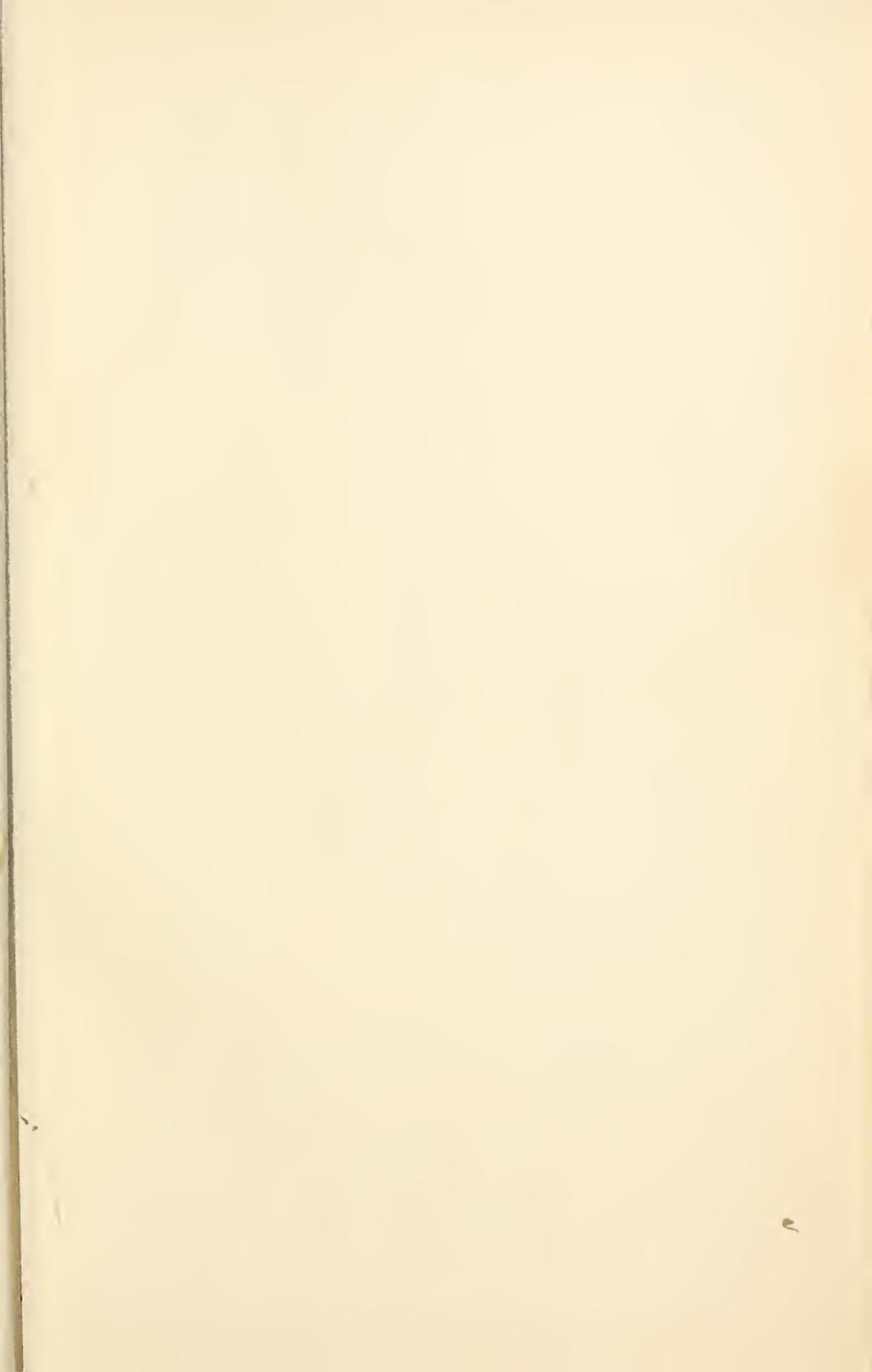
Catherine, according to general opinion, was utterly lost. Villebois declares that Peter planned a trial, modelled on that of Henry VIII., and only temporised so as to ensure the future of his children by his unfaithful wife. He hurried on the marriage of his elder daughter, Anne, with the Duke of Holstein, and caused overtures to be made for the union of the second, Elizabeth, with a French prince, or even with the King of France himself. But this plan, which seemed to be taking shape, and was irresistibly attractive to the Tsar, furnished an all-powerful argument for sparing Catherine.

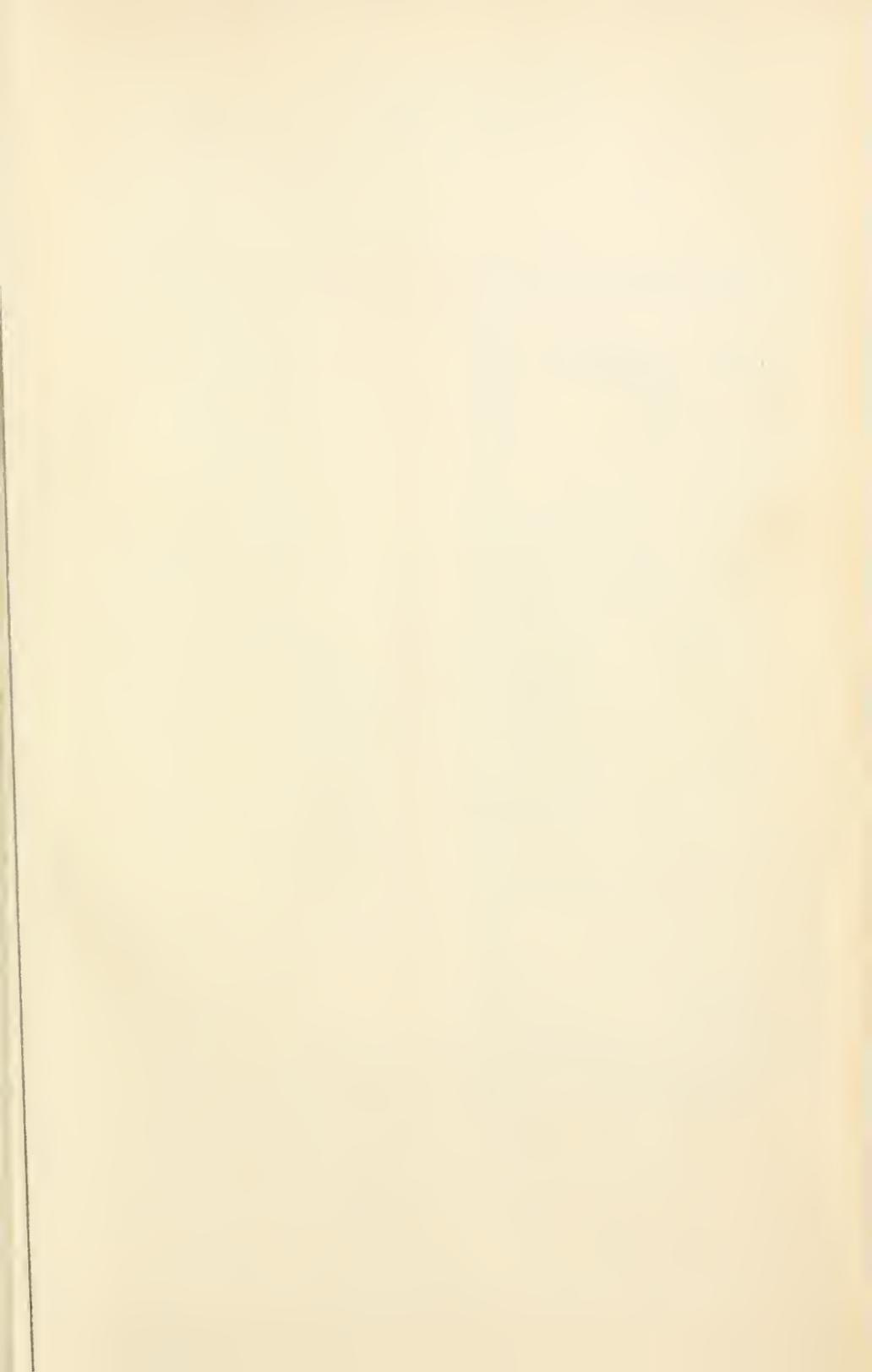
¹ *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 494. Description sent by the Emperor's Envoy, Rabutin.

Tolstoï and Ostermann, who were in negotiation with Campredon, laid the strongest stress upon it. The King of France, they said, would never be induced to marry the daughter of a second Anne Boleyn!¹

But Catherine's lucky star was to carry her through. On the 16th of January, 1725, signs of a reconciliation, only skin-deep, perhaps, and somewhat ungracious, on Peter's side, but yet significant enough, were generally observed. Lefort writes, 'The Tsarina has made a long and ample *Fussfall* (genuflection) before the Tsar, to obtain remission of her faults. The conversation lasted three hours, and they even supped together, after which they parted.' Less than a month afterwards, Peter was dead, and carried with him to his tomb, the secret of his anger, and of the vengeance which he may have been nursing, and preparing in secret. I must not, in this place, dilate upon the political use Catherine made of this event. Her subsequent private life justified, only too clearly, the jealous anxiety which poisoned the last days of the great Tsar. We must suppose that after twenty years of continuous effort, and never-ceasing watchfulness, during which all her faculties were incessantly concentrated on, and strained towards, the one end and aim, which she at last attained, there was a sort of sudden weakening of the moral spring, and a simultaneous leaping up of her long repressed taste for coarse sensuality, love of vulgar debauch, and vile instincts, physical and moral. She, who had done so much to restrain her husband from nocturnal orgies, ended by drinking all night long, and till 9 o'clock in the morning, with her casual lovers,—Loewenwalde, Devier, and Sapieha. Her reign, which, happily for Russia, only lasted sixteen months, was a mere casting of the sovereign power to Menshikof, and to short-lived favourites, who scrambled with him for every morsel of profit. The whilom devoted, helpful, and even heroic partner of the great Tsar, became a mere Comedy Queen, a base-born peasant, carried by some improbable chance up to the throne, and there taking her pleasure after her own low fashion.

¹ See for all this episode, Solovief, vol. xviii. p. 245; Scherer, vol. iv. p. 18, etc.; Sbornik, vol. iii. p. 90 (Leport); *Büschings-Magazin*, vol. xi. p. 490, etc. (Rabutin); Villebois' *Memoirs* (manuscript, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).





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