

# THE LAST DAYS OF TSAR NICHOLAS

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## PREFACE

### THE TRUTH ABOUT NICHOLAS ROMANOV

#### 1. *The Legend*

DURING the Yussupov libel action, which drew such a striking picture of manners and morals at the Court of Nicholas II, the last Russian Tsar, Sir William Jowitt, K.C., let fall a remark deserving of wider fame. He asked the injured lady: "It is about time somebody tried to show a true picture of that devoted couple who, according to the best of their beliefs, were doing their best for Russia?" And Princess Yusupova (née Romanova), naturally answered: "Yes."

Just as naturally the *Morning Post*, summing up the case after the verdict, did its best to restore the reputation of "the illustrious dead." Simple, credulous and bigoted—obstinate, credulous, simple—more sinned against than sinning—such are the harshest judgments which the Diehards' paper ventures to pass upon "that tragic pair." Nor is this the first occasion for such attempts to whitewash Nicholas Romanov and his wife.

The publication in 1929 of the letters exchanged by Nicholas and his wife, Alexandra, afforded an unexpected opportunity of which the defenders of the Romanovs fully availed themselves. No effort was spared in the attempt to draw the picture of two simple, kindly, charming souls, whose love for each other soared far above earthly affairs of State, and whose very ignorance and innocence left them helpless in the grip of a system stronger than themselves.

Dr. Hagberg Wright wrote: "The character of the Tsar emerges morally enhanced from the severe ordeal of having his private life laid bare to the world. No impartial historian will in the future pay any attention to the accusations of duplicity and cunning which flooded the press after the Revolution. . . . It is quite impossible to avoid a feeling of sympathy with a man overburdened from the outset with the weight of care thrust upon him." (Introduction to *Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa*.)

Mr. J. C. Squire followed in the same strain: "He had a strong sense of duty, a generous nature, a great capacity for affection, a desire to serve his people, no malice, no liking for cruelty and



slaughter: adversity sweetened his character, and at the worst moments he never complained. But he was not intelligent, he was not educated, he did not know what was going on in Russia, and he was a poor judge of men. . . . There is no sign at all in these letters that the Tsar ever came near realising the efficiency that is called for in modern civic, military and industrial organisation. If things were going badly anywhere, his only idea of a remedy was a stroke of the pen and the appointment of somebody who was bien-pensant, and whom his wife did not dislike." (*Observer*, February, 1929.)

A reviewer in the *Daily Telegraph* (March 1, 1929) took up the burden: "Nicholas II is revealed as a kind-hearted, affectionate creature; weighed down by a sense of responsibility to which he was utterly unable to rise; dependent for his inspiration upon an irresponsible wife, who was in her turn the victim of an unscrupulous adventurer. . . . Devotion to his home, and trust in a deep, superstitious religion—these were the prevailing consolations of a weak and wavering intellect." A writer in the *Evening Standard* thought that the "Letters" show "how inherently good and yet how utterly futile was this tragic figure." And so on.

After these moving sentences, the apologists need only say a few words about the execution of the Romanovs at Ekaterinburg, in June 1918. "A horrible deed . . . which humanity will always condemn" (Hagberg Wright); "They were too simple to understand, and too honourable to fly, and their death was the death of the Babes in the Wood" (J. C. Squire); "The last, terrible tragedy of Ekaterinburg" (the *Daily Telegraph* reviewer).

So, little by little, by means of suppressing truth and suggesting falsehood, has been built up a complete legend of Nicholas II. And this legend has not any abstract or academic purpose. Its object is intensely political—to serve the ends of the White counter-revolutionaries and their foreign supporters in fighting the Soviet Union. The legend of the kindly Charles I, ungratefully executed by his rebellious subjects, played a similar counter-revolutionary part against the English Republic of the seventeenth century. The story of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette helped many a noble adventurer in the Courts of Europe in the eighteenth century.

## 2. A Kind-hearted, Affectionate Creature

Unfortunately for the apologists, other documents from the pen of Nicholas Romanov have been made available by the November Revolution. The Tsar's letters to his mother, to Stolypin, to other officials: his marginal autograph comments on State papers laid before him by his ministers and diplomats: the diaries and memoirs of high court officials, have all become the property of the historian

within a few years of Nicholas' death. It took a couple of centuries to destroy the Charles Stuart legend, and a century to destroy the legend of the simple, honest, liberal Louis XVI. The documents already published by the Soviet Government are sufficient to ensure that the Nicholas Romanov legend will die more easily, once they become known.

In April 1895 a meeting of textile workers on strike at Yaroslavl was attacked by soldiers, and thirteen strikers were shot. "I am very satisfied with the behaviour of the troops at Yaroslavl during the factory disturbances," wrote the kindly Nicholas (within twelve months of his accession) on the margin of the official report. In the spring of 1903, there were terrible massacres of Jews at Kishinev and elsewhere. General Kuropatkin, Minister for War at the time, has the following entry in his diary for April 14, 1903 (just afterwards): "Before leaving (the Palace), Plehve sat with me for an hour. We talked about the disorders at Kishinev and Kronstadt. *Just as his Majesty had done*, Plehve said that the Jews ought to be taught a lesson, that they have got above themselves and are taking the lead of the revolutionary movement" (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1922, Vol. II, p. 43).<sup>\*</sup> On another occasion General Dratchevsky reported in person on the pogrom at Rostov. "How many were killed?" asked the Tsar. "Forty." "So few? I thought there were more," said Nicholas regretfully.

The first Revolution of 1905 left an imperishable trace of the Tsar's kindly and affectionate character—on the margins of his State papers. On August 6, 1905, General Trepoff reported to him that the Cossacks had "unfortunately" beaten with their nagaikas a group of doctors, who were under arrest on the charge of assisting the peasants of Saratov in the recent disorders. Nicholas underlined the word "unfortunately" in thick blue pencil, put a question mark at the side, and underneath wrote: "Very well done!" (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1925, Vols. XI–XII, p. 435.) On November 5 he was informed that 162 "anarchists" were stirring up strikes in Vladivostok. "They should all be hanged," wrote this simple but kindly monarch. (*Ibid.*, p. 436.)

The suppression of the peasant revolts against the feudal Junker barons of the Baltic Provinces was particularly ferocious, and the punitive expeditions sent out by the Imperial Government earned an unenviable reputation for themselves throughout the world. On December 14, one of the generals engaged in this work reported that he had spared the town of Tuksum, as the rebel authorities there had surrendered their arms, the Socialists had fled, and he himself was short of ammunition. "That is no reason. He should have

<sup>\*</sup> *Krasny Arkhiv* (*The Red Archives*) is the official publication of the Central Archives Department of the R.S.F.S.R.



destroyed the town," we find on the margin, in the handwriting of Nicholas II. (*Ibid.*, p. 439.) But a fortnight later he was consoled. On reading a report (December 30, 1905) that Riga had been captured with the slaughter of many thousands of workers, and that "Captain Richter not only shot, but also hanged the chief agitators," Nicholas did not attempt to conceal his admiration. "Fine fellow!" he wrote, opposite this part of the report. (*Ibid.*, p. 437.)

The suppression of the Revolution was followed by a new wave of Jewish pogroms. On February 16, 1906, the Cabinet asked Nicholas for permission to investigate the reports that a recent butchery of Jews at Gomel was facilitated by the commander of the local garrison, who had supplied the local "Black Hundred" with arms. "How does this concern me?" wrote the lovable autocrat, his character sweetened by adversity. There was indeed good reason for his remark, since he had publicly enrolled himself a member of the Black Hundred (the "Union of Russian Folk") and wore their badge at State functions, received their President, Dr. Dubrovin, as a friend, subscribed to their funds, and so on. Later, it is hardly necessary to add, he exercised his Imperial clemency and, out of the "generous nature" extolled by Sir John Squire, pardoned most of the chief ring-leaders of the pogroms.

### 3. "A Strong Sense of Duty."

It might be urged that these remarks and actions were not the result of firm and consistent policy, but merely the first, ill-considered and impetuous reactions of a combatant in the endless struggle to maintain the Tsardom. The fact that the Tsardom could not be maintained except by such methods, and in the spirit breathed by the marginal notes of Nicholas Romanov, is undeniable. But apologists go a little too far when they say that the Tsar did not understand "the efficiency that is called for in modern civic, military and industrial organisation," and thought that "a stroke of the pen" was all that was necessary to get out of a difficult position. Nicholas shows, in his marginal writings and otherwise, that for him violence and frightfulness were not incidents of passion, but the instruments of cold policy.

In May 1905, the Moscow City Council summoned a national conference of Mayors to discuss the growing menace of revolution. Such an assembly would stand politically for the right of the bulk of the British Conservative Party. Nicholas wrote on the margin of the report: "I hope this conference will not be allowed. They have been chattering enough already." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1925, Vols. XI-XII, p. 434.) Later in the year, when he heard that the Sebastopol Town Council had been parleying with the local revolutionaries, he wrote in his simple way: "I am amazed at the Sebastopol

Town Council interfering in other people's business. Reducing rebels to obedience is the task of the military authorities. . . . They will be treated as traitors and perjurers. N." (*Ibid.*, pp. 434-5.) When the general commanding a punitive force in the Caucasus reported, a little later, that he had suppressed the revolt without bloodshed, the Tsar said "That is no good! In such cases one must always shoot. . . . One must always shoot, General!" Is this the philosophy of a kindly innocent sitting on the throne?

In 1905 Nicholas put his principles into practice. The following ingenuous explanation of the pogroms organised in over 100 towns by the Black Hundreds, as the first blow of the counter-revolution, is contained in a letter to his mother, the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna, dated October 27, 1905. The fact that the Black Hundreds are not mentioned in the letter, despite the Tsar's intimate personal connection with them, is characteristic—as indeed is the whole letter: "During the first days after the manifesto, the bad elements strongly raised their heads; but then began a powerful reaction, and the whole mass of loyal people took heart. The result was comprehensible, and as is customary with us: the people revolted against the impudence and insolence of the revolutionaries and Socialists" (this within a month of the all-Russian General Strike!) "and as nine-tenths of them are Jews, all the hatred fell upon them—hence the Jewish pogroms. It is amazing with what *unanimity* and *suddenness* this happened in all the towns of Russia and Siberia. In England, of course, they say that these disorders were organised by the police, as usual—the old, well-known story. But it was not only the Jews who caught it, the Russian agitators, engineers, lawyers and all other rotten elements came in for it too. The incidents at Tomsk, Simferopol, Tver and Odessa showed clearly what an infuriated crowd can do, when it surrounded houses in which revolutionaries had shut themselves up, and set fire to them, killing everyone who came out." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1927, Vol. XXII, p. 169.)

Is this political lunatic, smacking his lips over the pogroms of Jews, engineers, lawyers "and all other rotten elements," a Babe in the Wood?

As the counter-revolution developed, the philosophy of "one must always shoot" gained the ascendancy more and more. On December 1, 1905, Nicholas writes to his mother: "From all sides voices begin to call louder and louder that it is time for the Government to begin acting energetically. This is a very great success! Witte was only waiting for this, and now he will begin to crush the revolution decisively—at all events, so he told me. . . . He is ready to order the arrest of the chief leaders of the rebellion. I told him long ago about this, but he constantly hoped to do without drastic measures." (*Ibid.*, p. 178.)



A year later, Nicholas' own ministers were desperately trying to persuade the man that there had been enough shooting. But his strong sense of duty made this difficult. On February 6, 1907, we read in the memoirs of General A. A. Polivanov (at that time Assistant War Minister) that the Cabinet discussed the continuing executions by decision of field courts-martial, and the likelihood of the forthcoming session of the Duma opening with a general attack on the Government because of these atrocities. It was agreed that a circular ought to be issued stopping the practice, followed up by a public Ukaz, or decree, on the eve of the session. But the Cabinet reckoned without the Tsar.

On February 13, Polivanov entered in his diary: "His Majesty has not agreed to the publication of an Ukaz on February 19, abolishing the field courts-martial, but has been pleased to order a circular limiting their scope." Two days later, when the War Minister was with the Tsar, the latter told him that the slightest attack on the Army in the Duma "must meet with a categorical (terrible) rebuff, and it can always be pointed out that the Army does not engage in politics, but fulfils a painful duty."\*

In this piece of advice Nicholas showed indeed his "strong sense of duty." That sense inspired him all through his life with the high watchword of: "One must always shoot, General." It was so right up to the very eve of the abdication forced from him in March 1917, when he despatched General Ivanov, one of the most notorious martinets in the Army, with a picked punitive force to subdue the "Socialists" in revolt at Petrograd. Ivanov's expedition only came to nought because the rifles began to go off in the wrong direction.

#### 4. "A Desire to Serve His People"

We have seen that Nicholas delighted in the slaughter of his political opponents (this term covering the category of workmen on strike), and that this delight sprang from his adherence to the fine old Romanov tradition that the autocracy must meet its difficulties with bullet, bayonet and knout—not at all by "a stroke of the pen," as naive British essayists like to think. Did he remain true to the other Romanov tradition—the maintenance of absolutism, single and unimpaired? In 1865 his grandfather, Alexander II, wrote (in a personal letter to his son): "Constitutional forms, after the manner of the West, would be the greatest possible disaster for us, and would have as their first result, not the unity of the State, but the dispersion of our Empire into fragments." In 1883 Nicholas' father, Alexander III, wrote to his chief adviser Pobedonostsev: "I am too deeply convinced of the scandalous nature of the representative elective

principle ever to permit its introduction into Russia, in the form in which it exists throughout Europe." What were the political opinions of Nicholas II?

Almost on the morrow of his accession, Nicholas gave the answer. One of the innumerable addresses of loyal congratulation on his marriage came from the Tver Provincial Zemstvo, a body created by Alexander II to create the impression that representative government was beginning. In reality, the Zemstvo was a mere occasional meeting of the nobility and gentry, with a few selected peasants. The address expressed the hope that such bodies "will be allowed to voice their opinions in matters in which they are concerned"—not a very revolutionary demand. On January 30, 1895, in the Winter Palace, Nicholas gave his reply to the assembled deputations from the provinces: "It has come to my knowledge that during recent months there have been heard in some meetings of the zemstvos the voices of those who have indulged in the senseless dreams that the zemstvos could be called to participate in the government of the country. I want everyone to know that I will devote all my strength to upholding, for the good of the nation, the principle of absolute autocracy, as firmly and strongly as did my lamented father." The phrase about "senseless dreams" ran like an electric shock throughout the entire country, and was never forgotten.

But perhaps it was merely an awkward turn of phrase, some youthful gaucherie—or, more natural still, a sentiment placed in the mouth of the robot Tsar by some evil adviser? Nicholas II gives the reply to this also, through his own intimate documents, in which no minister assisted.

On December 24, 1898, he wrote the following on the Foreign Minister's report concerning the situation in Crete: "It is very important at the earliest possible time to *limit*, as far as possible, the application of the representative principle in Crete, which the Crown Prince George asked particularly of me while I was still in Denmark. With this I am fully agreed." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1926, Vol. XXII, p. 250.) The italics are in the original.

From the beginning of his reign, Nicholas began an attack on the democratic and autonomous constitution of Finland, which had been secured by that country as the price of its union with Russia in 1809. In 1899 Nicholas and the Governor-General of Finland, Bobrikov, were making active preparations for the abolition of the separate Finnish battalions and the introduction of the Russian military regulations. On March 7, 1899, Nicholas wrote in a private letter to Bobrikov: "We have inherited a monstrous crookedly-built house, and the painful task has fallen upon us of rebuilding it (or its wing)." But mass demonstrations, monster petitions, and other signs of popular discontent soon warned the autocrat that he

\* A. A. Polivanov, *Memoirs*, vol. i, pp. 18-20 (Military Publishing Board, Moscow, 1924).



must hasten slowly, and in a further letter of March 19, 1899, the man whom Dr. Wright absolves from "the accusations of duplicity and cunning" wrote: "It seems better to me, until we have got them finally in hand, to let them amuse themselves with trifles, like little children. In time, of course, we shall not let all their tricks pass so unpunished." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1928, Vol. XXVII, pp. 229-230.)

On December 6, 1901, Nicholas assembled at one of his palaces the superior officers of the Corps of Gendarmerie. "I am very glad to see you, gentlemen," said this servant of his people. "I hope the alliance established to-day between myself and the Corps of Gendarmes will grow stronger year by year." It did indeed, such being the logical corollary of the policy of absolute autocracy in a country of rapidly-increasing class antagonism at home and Imperialist aggression abroad.

Despite the attempts of his apologists to represent Nicholas as ignorant of "what was going on in Russia," he was well aware of the essential principles on which the Tsardom rested, and in particular of the importance of the economic enslavement of the peasantry as the foundation-stone for the maintenance of autocracy. In a letter to his mother, on November 11, 1905, Nicholas wrote: "As you of course know, agrarian disorders have begun in Russia. This is the most dangerous phenomenon of all, on account of the ease with which the peasants can be incited to take the land from the land-owners, and also because everywhere there are insufficient troops. The Army is returning from Manchuria slowly, on account of the stoppage on the Siberian Railway." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1927, Vol. XXII, p. 173.) On January 11, 1906, Count Witte, his Prime Minister, reported on the desirability of alienating compulsorily a certain proportion of the State, Imperial and private lands, lest worse befall: "I do not approve," wrote Nicholas at this stage. Witte's report pointed out that it was a choice between giving up part of the land in order to retain undisturbed possession of the remainder, as in 1861, or else run the risk of losing all. "*Private property must remain untouched*," was the Tsar's comment.

Forced to grant a moderately liberal constitution, the Tsar literally felt himself a captive. When he heard that a deputation of British M.P.'s was on its way to Russia, to congratulate Muromtsev, the President of the new Duma, Nicholas relieved his feelings in a letter to his mother (September 27, 1906): "Some comic deputation is on its way from England with greetings to Muromtsev and the rest of them. Uncle Bertie" (Edward VII) "and the British Government have let us know that, to their great regret, they can do nothing to prevent them coming. Wonderful liberty! How angry they would be if a deputation came from us to the Irish, and wished them success

in their struggle against the Government!" (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1927, Vol. XXII, p. 202.)

One of the most illuminating documents—in the Emperor's own hand—is his reply, on December 10, 1906, to a memorandum from "Hangman" Stolypin, submitting proposals for abolishing the more glaring disabilities of the Jews, and pointing out that Nicholas had as good as promised this in his Manifesto of October 17, 1905.

Nicholas wrote: "Peter Arkadievich! I return you the memorandum on the Jewish question unconfirmed.

"Long before it was submitted to me, I may say that I thought and meditated on this question day and night. In spite of the most convincing arguments in favour of a decision in the affirmative, an inner voice ever more insistently repeats to me that I should not take this decision upon myself. So far my conscience has *never* deceived me. Therefore, in this case also, I intend to follow its dictates.

"I know you, too, believe that 'the Emperor's heart is in God's hand.'

"So be it. I bear a terrible responsibility before God for all authorities set up by me, and at any time I am ready to answer for them to him." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1924, Vol. V, p. 105.)

An interesting reflection of Nicholas' mood during the period of counter-revolution was his note (December 8, 1907) on the report of the Russian Minister at Teheran, describing the growing revolutionary movement in Persia after the establishment of a Medjliss (Parliament): "The Shah can save Persia only by immediately scattering the Medjliss and other revolutionary gatherings. This is the only reply." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1927, Vol. XXII, p. 251.)

It will be noticed that this remark not only breathes the spirit of his instructions regarding Crete, nine years before, but also follows directly from his declaration about "senseless dreams," at the very beginning of his reign. Nine years later, on the eve of the Revolution, we find his letters to his wife Alexandra imbued with exactly the same "ideals." On December 13, 1916, he describes his conversation with Trepov: "He set forth his plan concerning the Duma—to dismiss it on December 17 and convoke it again on January 19, in order to show them and the whole country that, in spite of all they have said, the Government wants to work with them. If in January they begin to cause confusion and trouble, he proposes to pour thunders on their heads (he briefly summarised his speech) and finally to close the Duma. . . . I did not deny the logical character of his plan, and also one advantage struck me, namely, that, if everything happens as he thinks, we should get rid of the Duma two or three weeks *sooner* than I thought, the middle of January instead of the beginning of February. So I approved this plan, but exacted



a solemn promise from him to keep to it and to hold out." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1923, Vol. IV, p. 185.)

Even two or three weeks' more freedom from the hated Duma, which was a living reminder of his winged words 20 years before, was worth the price of finally alienating a huge volume of public opinion in the midst of a great war. Whatever Nicholas II may have been deficient in (Count Witte said that he had "the average education of a Colonel of the Guards," and even Sir John Squire finds that "he was not intelligent, he was not educated"), he cannot be accused of lacking definite and clear political views. Autocracy must be maintained: representative institutions are an affliction sent by the devil—or by "engineers, lawyers, and other rotten elements": the peasants must stay as they are, and the principle of private property rest inviolate; the Jews must not only be kept in their place, but from time to time "taught a lesson": the other nationalities subject to the Romanov Empire must be "taken in hand." From this political creed naturally sprang the practice which we have already seen at work: "One must always shoot," and in the application of that practice Nicholas II developed very early the taste for blood, examples of which have also been quoted.

None of these characteristics were very original—they were all to be found, on a grander scale, a hundred years before, in the mad Paul and his sons, Alexander I and Nicholas I—but at all events they were well-defined. There is no excuse for the sentimental slobber of the apologists.

##### 5. "Too Simple and Too Honourable"

There remain one or two other facts about Nicholas to be established. We have already seen how little the anxiety to absolve him from "accusations of duplicity and cunning" squares with the Tsar's cynical letter to the Governor-General of Finland. That was at the beginning of his reign: no less illuminating, towards its end, is the following letter to his wife, dated December 14, 1916, and dealing with the same joint preparations with Trepov for dissolving the Duma mentioned a little earlier. "It is disgusting to have to deal with a man whom you do not like and distrust, like Trepov. But first of all we must find a successor for him, and then push him out—after he has done the dirty work. I mean to dismiss him when he has closed the Duma. Let all the responsibility and all the burdens fall on his shoulders, not on the shoulders of the man who takes his place." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, loc. cit., p. 189.)

This sage remark, well worthy of Machiavelli's "Prince," gives ample food for reflection to the propagandists for whom Nicholas Romanov is an "inherently good" and tragic figure. It is also a text for the lickspittles of monarchy everywhere.

It was not only in home affairs that there was displayed this double-facedness, of which Homiakov, the reactionary President of the Third Duma, said: "He doesn't lie, but he doesn't tell the truth either." In relation to the Tsar's "gallant Allies," the same features show themselves. As early as 1903, Kuropatkin's diary (February 3) shows that the war against Germany-Austria was in contemplation: "To-day I received a rescript of great importance from the sovereign, in which he informs me that, in the event of a conflict between Russia and the European Powers, he will assume the supreme command of all the armies himself, and proposes to appoint me Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the South-western front, ranged against Austria-Hungary." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1922, Vol. II, pp. 29-30.) It was shortly after this period, as is well known, that began the movement for a rapprochement with Great Britain and France.

However, this did not prevent the following entry being made in the diary of General Kuropatkin, under the date January 3, 1904: "I reported on the despatch of a Kalmuk, 2nd Lieutenant Ulanov, to Tibet, to find out what is happening there, and in particular what the English are doing. The sovereign was pleased to direct that this should be a private venture, at his own risk. He ordered me to advise Ulanov to 'incline the Tibetans against the English.' His Majesty said that I should not tell Lamsdorff of these instructions." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1923, Vol. II, p. 101.) Lamsdorff was Foreign Minister, and in that capacity working for a closer understanding with Great Britain. No doubt Nicholas decided not to "disturb" him by revealing his friendly advice to Lieutenant Ulanov.

The correspondence between the Tsar and the Tsaritsa during the war throws further light on that "devoted couple." True, the letters quoted below come from the pen of Alexandra: but in each case the context shows that there could have been no difference between Nicholas and his wife on this point; in the first, because Alexandra treats as a matter of course an event already known to both: in the second, because the opinions voiced are those of Rasputin, than whom there was no higher authority on earth for Nicholas.

The first letter, dated January 5, 1916, runs: "Mita Benk said at Paul's that Masha had brought a letter from Erny. A said that she knows nothing, but Paul declared it was true. *Who could have told him?* . . . It is unpleasant that again my name and the name of Erny are mentioned." (*Correspondence of Nicholas and Alexandra Romanov*, Vol. IV, pp. 19-20, Moscow, 1926.)

"Mita Benk" was Dmitri Benckendorff, a member of the Board of the Russian Bank for Foreign Trade. "Paul" was the Grand Duke of that name, "Masha" was Marie Vassilchikova, a lady-in-waiting. And "Erny" was Ernst Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse—Alexandra's brother, with whom she was in constant communication



throughout the war, and with whom Vassilchikova had recently established contact through Sweden, bringing Alexandra letters from him and from other German princes.

But the great Ally of the British Empire went further than mere "correspondence with the enemy." In the Tsaritsa's letter of June 5, 1916, we find: "In the opinion of our Friend, it is a good thing for us that Kitchener has perished, as later on he might have caused harm to Russia, and it is no loss that his papers perished with him. You see he is always frightened of England, what she will be like at the end of the war, when peace negotiations begin." (*Ibid.*, p. 289.) The Tsaritsa makes no comment on this interesting opinion, further than to mention that her friend Anna Vyubova had been commissioned to tell it to the Tsar during a recent visit, but had forgotten to do so. After the Yussupov case, it is hardly necessary to add that the "Friend" spoken of so reverently is none other than the monk Rasputin.

Previously the Imperial consorts had only exchanged the most banal of reflections on the disaster to the *Hampshire*—"How terrible, and what a loss for the English," and "The loss of Lord Kitchener must really be very painful for Georgy" (May 25); "But such is life, particularly in wartime" (May 26). It was left for Rasputin to express, and Alexandra to convey, the real feelings of the Romanov Court: nor is there any trace of protest or dissent on the part of Nicholas.

In passing, it should be mentioned that the extraordinary callousness of Alexandra's letter had its precedents—in the famous remark of Nicholas after the Hodynka catastrophe (June 1896), in which nearly 2,000 people who had assembled to celebrate the coronation, were crushed to death, that he did not see why the feast and the ball at the French Embassy, fixed for that day, should be countermanded: and in Nicholas' tranquil continuation of his pleasure trip after Stolypin, his Prime Minister, had been killed at the theatre in his presence (1911).

One cannot pass over in silence Sir John Squire's last desperate effort to save the reputation of his clients by the sublimely ridiculous remark that "they were too simple to understand and too honourable to fly; and their death was the death of the Babes in the Wood." Nicholas' diary shows that very soon after the Revolution he was contemplating flight: "March 23, 1917. Cleared up my books and things, and began to set aside everything I want to take with me, if I have to go to England." The narratives of the Whites themselves—E. Semchevskaya, the wife of a General Staff Officer ("Dvuglavy Orel," Berlin, 1921, Vol. XV), Kerensky (*From Afar*, Paris, 1922), Gilliard, tutor to the Tsarevich (in his diary published at Reval in 1921), Sokolov, who conducted the official White investigation into

the circumstances of Nicholas' execution (Berlin, 1925), General M. K. Dieterichs, formerly of the Imperial suite—all show that at that time the Provisional Government, by agreement with the British Ambassador, made a determined attempt to smuggle the Romanov family away to England. The attempt was frustrated only by the vigilance of the Petrograd Soviet. Bykov, in the pages which follow, tells the story of this period briefly but convincingly.

Throughout his captivity, and particularly after the establishment of the Soviet Government in November 1917, Nicholas was in close touch with numerous monarchist organisations, composed chiefly of ex-officers and wealthy merchants, who were plotting to get the Romanov family away (Tobolsk, Tiumen, Ekaterinburg). At Ekaterinburg itself, Nicholas and Alexandra kept up a constant correspondence with an "underground" group of thirty-seven ex-officers, headed by three or four Grand Dukes, sending their notes in loaves of bread, on the wrappers of parcels, and even in a cork. General Dieterichs publishes the text of a letter from Nicholas, containing an exact description of the house in which they were confined, the strength of the armed guard, posts of the sentries, and so forth. The authorities intercepted an exact plan of the house, with notes in Nicholas' handwriting, between the inner and outer linings of an ordinary envelope. And Nicholas' own diary for 1918 (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1928, Vol. XXVII, p. 136.) contains the following entry: "June 14, Thursday. . . . We spent a disturbed night, and sat up in our clothes. All this took place because recently we received two letters informing us that we must be ready to be rescued by some devoted persons! But days passed, and nothing happened, while the delay and uncertainty have been very worrying."

If the Romanovs did not escape, it was not because they were as innocent as the Babes in the Wood, but because the workers of Siberia and the Urals in 1918 were as watchful as the people of Paris in 1792.

## 6. Some Conclusions

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to revert to the opinions quoted earlier, and to show how little the portrait of Nicholas II, drawn by himself and his most intimate associates, corresponds with the rosy picture delineated by his apologists. Only brazen impudence or inexcusable ignorance can explain the legend of the "illustrious" Nicholas II.

F. A. Golovin, the moderate Liberal who was elected President of the Second Duma, wrote the following character sketch in 1912, after years of personal contact with the Tsar and observation of his actions:

"I positively affirm that the generally accepted view of Nicholas II as a foolish, weak-willed, insignificant creature who understands



nothing of what goes on around him, a tool in the hands of the Court clique by which he is surrounded, is quite baseless.

"True, he does not shine by his intelligence, nor does he possess a strong will; he is little prepared, apparently, for the difficult task which has fallen to his lot; but still it would be wrong to treat him as a nonentity acting not by his own will or understanding. Nicholas II is a poor copy of the bad qualities of Alexander I. The latter was for long considered a weak-willed man subjected to outside influence, first of Speransky, then of Arakcheyev; but later historical researches have shown that this view was a mistake. His natural cunning, duplicity and cowardice prompted him to act by stealth, hiding behind someone else's back, pretending that this person was using the Emperor's name without the Emperor's knowledge or consent. . . .

"Nicholas II acts in exactly the same way. Also by nature cunning, doublefaced and cowardly, he readily consents to let another's head bear the brunt of the popular hatred aroused by his own internal policy. . . . He always acts deliberately, crookedly, often malignantly sneers at society, yet at the same time maintains a cowardly screen of dissembled simplicity. To maintain the greatest possible power in his own hands, he sticks at nothing. The interests of the dynasty and of petty personal pride are for him above the interests of the State." (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1926, Vol. XIX, pp. 125-126.)

To this severe description, every word of which is borne out by the evidence previously quoted, must be added the qualities which Golovin, himself a supporter of capitalism, of the church and of monarchy, did not think it necessary to condemn—absolute devotion to the principle of autocracy, an inveterate fear and hatred of the oppressed peasants, workmen and subject nationalities, a callous belief in the efficacy of mass bloodshed which bordered on criminal lunacy, and the grossest superstition—which, beginning with an unshakeable confidence in his divine right and inspiration, degenerated in the days of Ilodora and Rasputin into miracle-working and amulet-worshipping. A cold-blooded scoundrel, the most degenerate representative of a decaying dynasty and a corrupt society—no milder language can give a just appraisal of the character of Nicholas II.

He was not executed because of his character, however, nor even directly because of his past crimes. The execution was first and foremost an act of social defence, at a critical moment in the history of the Revolution, when open rebellion fomented from without and armed intervention by hostile Powers were threatening a restoration and counter-revolution, as unmistakeably as did the Austrian—Prussian—British attack on revolted France in 1792. Nicholas Romanov and his family were shot (and countless hundreds of thousands were done to death during his reign without world-wide protests or armed intervention) in order to crush the symbol of the

old order and to warn off would-be aspirants to the throne. If the highest interests of the British Empire justified Amritsar, the Black-and-Tans, the bombing of villages in Iraq and Waziristan, the drowning of women in Gambia (not to speak of intervention in Russia and in China)—and this is the claim of all "constitutional" British parties—a hundred times more did the interests of the workers' and peasants' Revolution of November 1917 justify the execution of the Romanovs. And when the apologists of Nicholas II, avoiding both an examination of his political record and an authentic study of his character, attempt to condemn his execution, and create hostility to the Soviets—by referring to the undoubted fact that he loved his wife and children, and was loved by them in return, that he sometimes conferred favours on those who sought them, and frequently expressed human emotions—then it is timely to remind them of the biting reply given by Macaulay to an earlier generation of apologists for reaction and counter-revolution.

"The advocates of Charles, like the advocates of other malefactors against whom overwhelming evidence is produced, generally decline all controversy about the facts, and content themselves with calling testimony to character. He had so many private virtues! And had James the Second no private virtues? Was Oliver Cromwell, his bitterest enemies themselves being judges, destitute of private virtues? And what, after all, are the virtues ascribed to Charles? A religious zeal, not more sincere than that of his son, and fully as weak and narrow-minded, and a few of the ordinary household decencies which half the tombstones in England claim for those who lie beneath them. A good father! A good husband! Ample apologies indeed for fifteen years of persecution, tyranny and falsehood!

"We charge him with having broken his coronation oath; and we are told that he kept his marriage vow! We accuse him of having given up his people to the merciless inflictions of the most hot-headed and hard-hearted of prelates; and the defence is, that he took his little son on his knee and kissed him! We censure him for having violated the articles of the Petition of Right, after having, for good and valuable consideration, promised to observe them; and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six o'clock in the morning! It is to such considerations as these, together with his Vandyke dress, his handsome face, and his peaked beard, that he owes, we verily believe, most of his popularity with the present generation.

"For ourselves, we own that we do not understand the common phrase, a good man, but a bad king. We can as easily conceive a good man but an unnatural father, or a good man and a treacherous friend. We cannot, in estimating the character of an individual, leave out of our consideration his conduct in the most important of all human



relations; and if in that relation we find him to have been selfish, cruel, and deceitful, we shall take the liberty to call him a bad man, in spite of all his temperance at table, and all his regularity at chapel." (*Essays*, 1860 edition, London, Vol. I, pp. 36-37.)

The requisite changes made, there is little that need be added in reply to the advocates of Nicholas Romanov.

It remains only to commend to the earnest attention of the reader the little book by P. M. Bykov, Chairman of the Ekaterinburg (now Sverdlovsk) Soviet in 1918, in which the last days of the Romanovs are described by an eye-witness and a participant in the great Russian Revolution.

ANDREW ROTHSTEIN.

March, 1934.

*Seventeenth anniversary of the  
overthrow of the Romanov tyranny.*

## THE LAST DAYS OF TSARDOM

### CHAPTER I

#### ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

THE Romanov dynasty for the first time came face to face with the danger of losing its throne in 1905. The Imperial Government, with the active help of French finance, succeeded in crushing the revolution and saving the dynasty. All power remained as before in the hands of Tsarism. But the situation thereafter changed considerably.

The Russian bourgeoisie had long wielded economic power. After 1905 it began to acquire more and more influence in the political sphere also. In this it was assisted by the "Constitution of the Third of June" (1907), which opened the gates of political activity wide before the bourgeoisie. All the bourgeois parties—Cadets, Octobrists, etc.—were in effect legalised, and their press enjoyed great freedom. They rapidly gained the upper hand in municipal authorities, congresses of various kinds, the Duma and other public bodies, making them the base of their ever-growing political influence.

Side by side with this the bourgeoisie drew closer to the Tsardom, which was adapting itself more and more to the service of the capitalist development of the country. To a certain degree, one might say, the Tsardom was becoming bourgeois. By 1914 the Russian bourgeoisie beyond all doubt partially exercised political power, and its attitude frequently determined the policy of the Imperial Government.

The war at first welded the Russian bourgeoisie even more closely to Tsardom, and established full harmony and agreement between them. But within three or four months this unity was shaken. The autocracy proved bankrupt in face of the vast problems created by the war. The Russian troops suffered one defeat after another, thanks to the absence of a sufficient quantity of rifles, cartridges and shells. The position in the rear was little better. Here was beginning to make itself felt one of the most serious consequences of the war—economic collapse, produced to a large extent by the incapacity of the Government to grapple with wartime difficulties. All this made a Russian victory in the war most uncertain, and drove the Russian bourgeoisie along the path of opposition to the Tsarist Government.



The bourgeoisie was interested in a successful outcome of the war. From the very outset it had transformed the public bodies under its control (the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos, the All-Russian Union of Towns, etc.) into auxiliaries of the State military and civil machine. They were more mobile than the State bodies, and soon became of great importance in the prosecution of the war. The Government was obliged to give recognition to their work and to grant them fairly extensive powers. But the bourgeoisie considered that this was insufficient, and insistently demanded an even larger share in the leadership and organisation of the war.

The retreat from Galicia of the Russian troops in April 1915, forced the Government to make concessions. In the summer a Special Conference for Public Defence was set up at Petrograd, representatives of manufacturers, of the Duma, etc., participating. From that time onward war economy was in effect under the control of the bourgeoisie. But this was not enough. The bourgeois representatives in the Duma, in the name of the so-called "Progressive Bloc" which commanded a majority, put forward the demand for a "responsible ministry."

Thus the bourgeoisie desired not merely to control war economy through the Special Conference, but to establish its political control over the country. The latter became all the more urgently necessary, in its eyes, because in Court circles the pro-German tendency, striving for an understanding with Germany and a separate peace, began to grow in strength.

Rumours of negotiations behind the scenes disturbed the patriotically-inclined bourgeoisie no less than defeats at the front or chaos and collapse in the rear. Nevertheless, the Duma could not make up its mind to enter on an active struggle with the Tsar's Government, fearing thereby to excite a mass movement which seemed even more dangerous than the maintenance of the autocracy. The Duma's opposition was therefore extremely moderate, and in the main of a verbal character.

The bourgeoisie, therefore, failed to achieve its object of a responsible ministry by peaceful methods. The Court camarilla, headed by Rasputin, held power firmly in its own hands and would not tolerate any further concessions. Nicholas II, weak-willed and intellectually limited, was entirely under its influence and a mere pawn in the hands of his wife, who in her turn, as is well known, was exceptionally dominated by Rasputin.

In fact, the autocracy of Rasputin was established. His omnipotence may be judged from the fact that, during the last two or three years before the overthrow of the autocracy there was scarcely a single change in the Cabinet made without his knowledge and consent. This seizure of power by Rasputin was accompanied by an unheard-of

corruption of the Tsarist machine, which became the field of operations for all kinds of adventurers and blackmailers. Even such a double-dyed monarchist as Purishkevitch was forced to admit that "our Government is nothing but a kaleidoscope of mediocrity, egotism, careerism of individuals who live only for to-day and are mindful only of their own interests."\*

In circumstances of extending economic collapse and of unending reverses and defeats of the Russian Army, the administration of the Rasputin clique increased the dissatisfaction of all sections of the people with the Government. The bourgeoisie took advantage of this, and of its position in the Duma, to concentrate the attention of the masses on its exposure of the activities of the so-called "dark forces."

The autumn of 1916 saw discontent rising to serious dimensions. Even amongst the loyal nobility the policy of the Imperial Government no longer met with the old unquestioning support. The Conference of the Nobility on November 28 declared its support of the moderate demands of the Progressive Bloc.

After the nobility came the turn of the Tsar's relatives—the Grand Dukes, who implored the Tsar to take steps to save the dynasty from destruction otherwise inevitable. The Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovitch anxiously wrote to Nicholas II: "We are passing through the most perilous moment in Russian history. . . . There are some forces inside Russia which are leading you, and consequently Russia, to inevitable destruction."† There followed a letter of warning from another relative, the Grand Duke Nicholas Michaelovitch, who told the Tsar that he was "on the eve of a new era of disorder." He assured Nicholas that, "if it were only possible to eliminate the constant interference of dark forces in every sphere, the regeneration of Russia would begin at once, and the lost confidence of the vast majority of your subjects would return."‡ The Grand Duke George Michaelovitch went even further, hinting at the necessity, in the interests of the Dynasty, of forming—true, in a very remarkable fashion—a "responsible ministry."

However, Nicholas was deaf to all these entreaties and counsels. He would not agree to any diminution of his autocratic power, while his wife simply refused to hear any talk of it. "Whoever wants a responsible ministry is a fool," she wrote to Nicholas, referring to the letter from the Grand Duke George.§ As for the letter from the Grand Duke Nicholas Michaelovitch, who had plucked up courage to mention the danger of the influence of "dark forces," and in particular of herself, Alexandra Feodorovna wrote to her husband:

\* *The Murder of Rasputin* (from the Diary of V. Purishkevich), p. 5.

† *Nicholas II and the Grand Dukes* (Correspondence between the last Tsar and his relatives). State Publishing Agency, 1925, pp. 117-118.

‡ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-7.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 20.



"Please order Nicholas Michaelovitch to leave: he is a dangerous element here in town." And the Grand Duke was in consequence banished from Petrograd to his estates.

Invariably meeting with this resistance from Nicholas, this section of the ruling class began to seek other ways of saving themselves and the dynasty. In their eyes, the chief culprit for the increasing national collapse, and for the influence of "dark forces" over the Tsar was Rasputin. Only his elimination could save the dynasty. Therefore in their midst arose the idea of murdering Rasputin. The Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch, together with Prince Yussupov and the noted monarchist Purishkevitch, made up their minds to take this "heroic" step.

They intended to draw into their plot V. Maklakov, one of the prominent Cadet leaders, and thereby to impart to their enterprise the character of a broad public undertaking. But Maklakov, while not objecting in principle to their "worthy" object, took fright and refused to participate, on the plea of an urgent call out of Moscow. According to Purishkevich, Maklakov said that "he could hardly be of much practical use in the liquidation of Rasputin. But thereafter, if matters did not go smoothly, and we were caught, he was not only ready to help us with legal advice, but would willingly come forward as our counsel, should matters come to a trial. 'But this is what I earnestly ask you,' added Maklakov warmly. 'If you succeed, be kind enough to send me an urgent telegram, saying for example: 'When do you arrive?' I will understand that Rasputin no longer exists, and that Russia can breathe freely.'"

Thus the hope of saving the autocracy by killing Rasputin was shared by the leadership of the chief bourgeois Opposition party, which was unofficially cognizant of this terrorist undertaking.

On December 17, 1916, Rasputin was killed in the house of Prince Yussupov, where he had been invited to a specially organised dinner-party. But the salvation of the Tsardom did not, of course, follow. The changes in the Cabinet which took place subsequently displayed the firm determination of the Tsarist Government to carry on its previous policy, reckoning neither with the bourgeois opposition, in the shape of the Progressive Bloc, nor with opposition tendencies in its own midst.

Influenced by this, some representatives of the bourgeoisie, and also some military circles, began to discuss—at first secretly, later more and more openly—the idea of coming to a settlement by means of a palace revolution. "This idea," says Kurlov, "found support even amongst certain members of the Imperial House."

However terrified the bourgeoisie at the possibility of a mass movement in consequence of such a revolution, it was still driven to this decision as the sole possible guarantee of victory in the war. P. Miliukov, in his *History of the Second Russian Revolution*, states that there existed two groups which were discussing the details of the forthcoming revolt. One, consisting apparently of military men, was headed by General Krymov. The other was composed of "some members of the Executive of the Progressive Bloc, together with some provincial and municipal public men." This group, according to Miliukov, "discussed the question of the part to be played by the Duma after the revolution. After discussing various possibilities, this group also decided on the regency of the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, as the best means of establishing in Russia a constitutional monarchy. A considerable number of members of the first Provisional Government took part in the discussions of this group."

This, in general terms, was the political programme of the conspirators. What measures they were prepared to take to achieve their object is recounted by General Denikin in his memoirs. It was proposed that, during one of Nicholas' visits to General Headquarters, General Krymov with a special detachment should attack the Imperial train and request the Tsar to abdicate. In the event of Nicholas proving obstinate, he was to be "physically eliminated." The plan was to be carried out in February 1917.

While preparations for this palace revolution were being pushed ahead, and were becoming known fairly widely, the Imperial Government, without knowing in detail the plans of its opponents, was preparing its counterblow. The details are described by General Kurlov, according to whom the counterblow resolved itself into the dissolution of the Duma, while the masses were to be kept in check by publishing "a law granting land to the peasants . . . establishing the equality of the whole people in civil rights . . . and declaring the equal rights of all nationalities."

That such a plan really existed can partially be seen from the evidence of Protopopov, Minister for the Interior, before the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry, set up by the Provisional Government after the February Revolution in order to investigate the illegal activities of politicians of the old regime. Apparently the Imperial Government linked the plans indicated with the idea of a separate peace with Germany, which of course was not mentioned by Kurlov and Protopopov for obvious reasons.

But neither the palace revolution nor the counterblow materialised, owing to the fact that in February 1917 a third power, the working

\* *The Murder of Rasputin*, p. 26.

† *The End of Russian Tsarism* (Memoirs of General P. G. Kurlov), State Publishing Agency, 1924, p. 280.

\* P. N. Miliukov: *History of Second Russian Revolution*, Vol. i, Part I, Sofia, 1922, p. 36.  
† *Op. cit.*, pp. 284-5.



class, intervened in the struggle for power, and prevented the fulfilment of either plan. Thereafter events turned out quite differently from the wishes of the bourgeoisie or the hopes of the Tsarist Government.

## CHAPTER II

### THE OVERTHROW OF THE AUTOCRACY

WHILE the bourgeoisie was organising a palace revolution in order to continue the war "to a complete victory," the masses of workers and soldiers who bore the full burden of the consequences of the war were also moving into struggle against the autocracy. But their demands went much further than the moderate "reforms" which constituted the programme of the Progressive Bloc. The bourgeoisie saw in this—not without foundation—a sign of the approach of revolution, with which it associated the ideas of defeat in the war and its own and the dynasty's destruction. Therefore it was no less alarmed than the Tsardom at the daily growth of revolutionary ferment amongst the workers and in the army. V. Shulgin, the prominent monarchist, quotes the following interesting conversation with the Cadet Shingarev:

"The situation is growing worse every day," said Shingarev anxiously to him at the beginning of January 1917. "We are moving towards the abyss. Revolution means destruction, and it is towards revolution that we are going. The railways are in a disastrous condition again, and there are serious complications at Petrograd in regard to the food supply. We must hold out to the spring: but I am afraid we shall not hold out."

"We must hold out," Shulgin replied. "But how? Even if our insane Government makes concessions, even if it forms a responsible Ministry, this will not be satisfactory. Popular feeling has already passed over our heads, it is already well to the left of the Progressive Bloc. The country gives heed to those who are most to the left, not to us. . . . It is too late."\*

Seeing the rise of revolution, the bourgeoisie took every possible step to avert it. While appealing to the workers to keep calm, it implored the Government to make concessions to the demands of the Progressive Bloc, which alone, in its opinion, could save the situation. And even when the left wing of the bourgeois Opposition—the pro-war Social-Democrats—proposed a workers' demonstration in support of the Duma on February 27, i.e., in support of

\* V. Shulgin: *Days*, p. 86; *Priboi*, Leningrad, 1925.

the Progressive Bloc itself, the bourgeoisie were so terrified that their leader Miliukov hastily published an Open Letter to the workers of Petrograd, pleading with them to abandon the demonstration, which, in his words, was nothing but a "perfidious device" of the enemy.

On the very same day as Miliukov's appeal (February 10), Rodzianko, the President of the Duma, was doing his best to persuade the Tsar of the peril with which approaching events were pregnant, and of the necessity of making concessions.

"Save yourself, your Majesty," said Rodzianko. "We are on the eve of tremendous events, whose outcome cannot be foreseen. What your Government and you yourself are doing is irritating the people to such an extent that anything is possible."

But, confident of himself and of the time-honoured methods of crushing revolution, the "Lord's Anointed" put off the annoying Rodzianko with his usual phrase: "The Lord will provide—everything will be all right." "The Lord will provide nothing," retorted the pious Rodzianko. "You and your Government have spoiled everything. A revolution is inevitable."

The demonstration appointed for February 27, which so frightened the bourgeoisie, did not take place. This was not because the workers listened to the appeals of Miliukov, but because the proposal of the jingoes was sharply rebuffed by the internationalist organisations, who regarded the demonstration as support of the Duma's demand for a "responsible ministry" and a "fight to a finish." Such demands no longer satisfied the workers, and they refused to follow the jingoes. The revolutionary ferment, however, began thereafter to extend day by day with overwhelming force. By the beginning of March it had seized upon literally all the workers of Petrograd, and began to break out spontaneously in strikes. On March 8 tens of thousands of workers struck. On March 10 their numbers already ran into hundreds of thousands. From the very first, the movement was of a clearly expressed political character.

As soon as it became clear that the movement was assuming such wide proportions, the bourgeoisie, in the person of the Duma, and individual politicians of the old regime began straining every nerve to save the situation.

Rodzianko, the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, the Prime Minister Galitzin, and others sent Nicholas one telegram after another on the seriousness of the situation and the necessity of forming a "responsible Ministry," as a concession to save the Tsardom and put an end to the movement. These telegrams made no impression on the Tsar: he put off his unwelcome advisers with quiet obstinacy. He replied to his brother Michael thanking him for his advice, but adding, with great self-assurance, that he knew himself how to act. In a telegram to Prince Galitzin, written out in



his own hand, Nicholas stated that at present he saw no possibility of making any changes in the Cabinet, and demanded the suppression of the revolutionary movement and of the mutinies among the troops.

"During these days," writes N. Sokolov, "Nicholas was tranquil, and in no way showed the shadow of any anxiety."\*

On March 11 and 12 all the workers of Petrograd were already in the streets, and the Army joined the movement. By the evening of March 12 the entire capital was in the hands of the insurgents, with the exception of the Governor's building, the Admiralty, the Winter Palace and the fortress of Peter and Paul. On the same day the Petrograd Council of Workers' Deputies (the Soviet) was organised, and simultaneously was formed the Provisional Committee of the Duma. But the Tsar as before could not comprehend the events which were developing, and did not realise that his own head was at stake. In response to the insistent demands of General Habalov, commander of the forces of the Petrograd Military District, for the despatch of reinforcements, Nicholas issued on March 11 a decree for the suppression of the insurrection, as though it were a question of some strike or other.

"I order that this very day the disorders in the capital, intolerable at this most difficult time of war with Germany and Austria, be brought to an end. Nicholas."†

But Nicholas' decree was too late. The capital was already in the hands of the revolting workers and soldiers.

Faced with the fact of the overthrow of Tsarism, the bourgeoisie hastened to take the leadership of the revolution into its own hands. The most important question was how to delay the progress of the revolution, how to save the Tsardom by sacrificing Nicholas.

On March 14 a secret consultation of the members of the newly-formed Provisional Committee of the Duma took place. They all agreed in declaring that the monarchy must be maintained, and that Nicholas alone must be sacrificed in order to save Russia. A. Guchkov, the Octobrist leader, enlarged on this theme as follows: "It is extremely important that Nicholas II should not be overthrown by violence. Only his voluntary abdication in favour of his son or brother can ensure the firm consolidation of the new order without great convulsions. The voluntary abdication of Nicholas II is the only means of saving the Imperial regime and the Romanov dynasty."‡

The representatives of the bourgeoisie overwhelmed the Tsar with telegrams begging him to "renounce" the throne in favour of his son Alexei, with Michael Alexandrovitch (his brother) as Regent. Nicholas now no longer displayed his former obstinacy, as even he

at last had realised that power was no longer in his hands. On March 13 he had already decided to leave General Headquarters in order to join his family at Tsarskoye Selo, but his train was stopped by orders from Petrograd, and he had no alternative but to go to Pskov, the road to which was open. In this way the last of the Romanovs came to be personally convinced, even before his abdication, that he had lost his power.

On March 14 Nicholas arrived at Pskov, and on the same day signed an act of abdication, in favour of his son. Later on, as we shall see, he thought better of this decision.

Meanwhile, at Petrograd, the interests of the Duma and the Soviet had come into conflict. The Provisional Committee had decided to send Rodzianko and Shidlovsky on its behalf to the Tsar at G.H.Q., with instructions to procure from Nicholas an act of abdication in favour of his son, and appointing the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch as Regent. News of this decision came to the Petrograd Soviet, which during these days was in permanent session at the Taurida Palace. On behalf of the Soviet, Chkheidze demanded that the Provisional Committee should give an explanation and the text of the act of abdication which it had adopted. When it had made itself acquainted with this text, the Petrograd Soviet rejected the formula transferring power to a new autocrat, and demanded the proclamation of a Republic.

While these negotiations were continuing, two of the Duma leaders, A. I. Guchkov, and V. V. Shulgin, obtained on March 15 a special train at the Warsaw station and left for G.H.Q. in order to "persuade" Romanov to "renounce" his authority.

Shulgin describes the comedy of Nicholas' abdication thus:

"We arrived at nine in the evening. A few lines away stood a brightly lit-up train. We understood that this was the Imperial train.

"Someone came up at once. 'His Majesty is expecting you.'

"He led us across the rails. We entered: it was a large drawing-room car, green silk on the walls, a few tables here and there. A tall, lean old yellow-grey general with shoulder-knots came forward. It was Baron Frederiks.

"His Majesty appeared in the doorway. He was wearing a grey Caucasian tunic. He seemed calm.

"We bowed. His Majesty greeted us and shook hands. If anything, his movement was friendly. With a gesture, he invited us to be seated. He sat down on one side of a small square table, which was pushed up against the green silk wall. Guchkov sat on the other side. I took my place by Guchkov, diagonally from the Tsar. Opposite the Tsar sat Baron Frederiks.

"Guchkov was the spokesman. His speech had seemingly been

\* N. Sokolov: *The Murder of the Imperial Family*, p. 6 (Slovo, Berlin, 1925).

† *The Fall of the Tsarist Regime*, Vol. 1, p. 190.

‡ M. Paleologue: *Imperial Russia on the Eve of the Revolution*, p. 355 (Moscow 1923).



well thought out, but he mastered his agitation with difficulty. He spoke jerkily and low.

"The Tsar sat leaning slightly on the silken tapestry and looked straight in front of him. His expression was quite calm and impenetrable. The only thought that might be guessed from his face was, 'This long speech is unnecessary.'

"During this period General Russky entered. He bowed to the Tsar and, without interrupting Guchkov, took his place between Baron Frederiks and myself. At that moment, I think, I noticed that in a corner sat another general, with dark hair and white epaulettes. This was General Danilov.

"Guchkov again grew agitated. He had reached the point that possibly the only way out was to abdicate the throne.

"Guchkov ended. The Tsar replied. After the anxious tones of Guchkov, his voice sounded calm, simple and precise. Only his guardsman's accent was a little foreign.

"'I have decided to renounce the throne. Up to three o'clock to-day I thought I could abdicate in favour of my son Alexei. But now I have changed my decision in favour of my brother Michael. I trust you will understand the feelings of a father.'

"The last phrase was uttered in lower tones.

"The Tsar rose, followed by all. Guchkov handed him the draft. Nicholas took it and went out. After a little time he returned, and, handing Guchkov a document, said: 'Here is the text.'

"It was in two or three copies on quarter-sheets of note-paper, such as were used at G.H.Q. for telegrams. The text was typewritten."\*

Guchkov, in the words of A. Blok, was amazed that the abdication was made so easily. The scene produced a painful impression on him by its drabness, and it came into his head that he was dealing with an abnormal individual, with a lowered sensitiveness and intelligence. The Tsar, according to Guchkov's impression, was completely unconscious of the tragic significance of events. The most iron self-control might have broken down, but his voice appeared to tremble only when he spoke of separation from his son.†

The abdication of Nicholas, like his renunciation of his original decision to abdicate in favour of his son, was undoubtedly dictated by considerations of personal safety. This can be seen, incidentally, from the letter of Alexandra Feodorovna (the Empress) to Nicholas on March 17, in the postscript of which she wrote: "Only this morning we heard that everything had been handed over to Misha, and Baby is now safe—what a relief!"‡

Even before Nicholas' abdication in favour of his brother became

\* Shulgin, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-180.

† A. Blok: *The Last Days of Imperial Power*, p. 107, Petrograd, 1921.

‡ *Family Correspondence of the Romanovs (Red Archives, Vol. iv, p. 221).*

known, P. Miliukov, in the name of the Provisional Government which had just been formed, announced at a meeting in the Taurida Palace that power would be vested in a Regent, the Grand Duke Michael, while Alexei would be the Heir-Apparent.

This information caused great discontent and indignation among the workers and soldiers of Petrograd. The feeling was so strong that it already threatened to find expression in a movement against the bourgeoisie itself. Miliukov gives one of these facts. "By the end of the day (March 15)," he writes, "the excitement caused by my announcement of the Regency of the Grand Duke Michael had greatly increased. . . . Late at night a large body of extremely agitated officers entered the Taurida Palace, and declared that they could not return to their units unless P. N. Miliukov withdrew his statement."\*

Terrified by the rising wave of this movement, the bourgeoisie hastened to yield its positions.

The day after the abdication—March 16—as soon as Guchkov and Shulgin arrived in Petrograd, and while they were still at the station, they were called up on the telephone by Miliukov, who requested them, in the name of the Provisional Government, not to make known the act of abdication.

Shulgin gives this conversation as follows:

"Yes, it is I, Miliukov. Don't make known the manifesto. Serious changes have been made."

"But how? . . . I have already announced it."

"To whom?"

"Why, to all here. Some regiment or other, the people. . . . I have proclaimed Michael Emperor."

"You should not have done that. Feelings have become much worse since you left. We have received the text: it is quite unsatisfactory. Don't take any further steps. There may be great misfortunes."†

While this conversation was going on, Guchkov had left to announce the "glad news" at a meeting in the railway workshops, at which there were 2,000 workers present. Shulgin decided to go and warn Guchkov, but, fearing that the act of abdication might be taken away from him and destroyed, he handed it over beforehand to a messenger specially despatched by Bublikov, a member of the Duma. While Shulgin was looking for him, Guchkov was arrested by the railway shopmen, who demanded that he should destroy the act of abdication. They did not find the document in his possession. He was then despatched, under a guard of armed workers, to the carriage of the commissary for the North-Western Railway. After 'politely detain-

\* P. Miliukov, *op. cit.*, Vol. i, Part I, p. 52.

† Shulgin, *op. cit.*, p. 189.



ing' Guchkov for twenty minutes, the commissary let him go directly the workers had calmed down.

This incident is also described in his memoirs by G. Lomonosov, who met Lebedev, the man entrusted with the act of abdication. The following conversation took place between them:

" 'Where is the act?'

" 'Here it is,' whispered Lebedev hoarsely, pushing a document into my hand. 'Guchkov has been arrested by the workmen.'

" 'What?' I asked confusedly, sticking the act of abdication into a breast pocket.

" 'I will tell you in the Ministry.'

" We enter Bublikov's room in silence.

" 'Well, how goes it?' asked Bublikov.

" 'Guchkov is arrested. . . . Here's the act of abdication.'

" However sensational the news of Guchkov's arrest might be, the eyes of everyone, forgetful of his fate, were fixed on the scrap of paper I placed on the table.

" 'Yes, and what has happened to Guchkov?' asked Bublikov after a moment's silence.

" 'When his train arrived at Petrograd, he was met here by a fair crowd, and he made two speeches while still in the station. Then he went to a meeting in the workshops. When I arrived, he was already there, while Shulgin and the management were sitting in the station-master's office. There was word that feelings were running high in the workshops. We were very anxious. Then they informed us from the shops that Guchkov had been arrested, that they hadn't found the document on him, and that they are going to search the other deputies, in order to destroy the act.'

" 'Why?'

" 'The comrades want to overthrow the Tsar and everything else, apparently. The abdication isn't enough for them.'

" 'Well, and then?'

" 'Then I was given the document, and taken away quietly through alleys and byways to the other side, and got away. . . . They are looking for the document all over the city. They may come here too. It must be hidden.'

" 'Put it in the safe, and put a guard over it.'

" 'No, put it somewhere inconspicuous, and not in this room.'

" The document was concealed among the dusty old piles of official journals on a what-not in the secretarial room."\*

In this way, having no opportunity of saving the monarchy, the bourgeoisie put its trust in an unknown future, and tried at least to save the act of abdication, which has ever since remained a lost docu-

\* Professor G. V. Lomonosov, *Recollections of the Revolution of March*, 1917, pp. 28-29, Stockholm-Berlin, 1921.

ment.\* On the same day, March 16, a second comedy, of the abdication of Michael, was arranged. There were present, in addition to the Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovitch, the following members of the Provisional Government: Prince Lvov, P. Miliukov, A. Kerensky, N. Nekrasov, I. Tereschenko, I. Godnev, V. Lvov, A. Guchkov, and in addition the following members of the Provisional Committee of the Duma: M. Rodzianko, V. Shulgin, N. Efremov, M. Karaulov, and others. The meeting took place under very conspirative conditions, as, knowing the discontent prevalent among the masses of workers and soldiers, those present were more than concerned for their lives and for the life of the new "anointed."

There were two points of view expressed, for and against the renunciation of the succession by Michael. The first was put forward by Rodzianko and Kerensky. Both declared that the proclamation of the new Tsar would call forth even greater anger and discontent among the masses, and would inevitably lead to civil war. Furthermore, they pointed out, to accept the throne under such conditions would endanger the life of the Grand Duke himself.

"I have no right to conceal here," said Kerensky at the close of his speech, addressing Michael, "what perils you personally incur in the event of your deciding to accept the throne. . . . In any case I cannot answer for the life of your Highness."† This argument seemed most convincing to Michael, and, as we shall see, decided the question of the throne.

Miliukov represented the second point of view, and earnestly opposed the abdication. In his speech he declared that, "although those are right who say that the acceptance of power involved risk to the personal safety of the Grand Duke and the ministers themselves, but this risk must be run in the interests of our country," as, in his opinion, "the Provisional Government alone, without a monarch, is a frail bark, which may sink in the ocean of national disorder: and the country will then be in danger of complete anarchy."‡

Only Guchkov supported Miliukov. The majority supported the necessity of Michael renouncing the throne and leaving the question of the monarchy open until the Constituent Assembly, which must, in their opinion, independently settle it. Then Guchkov, says Paleologue, made his supreme effort, addressing himself personally to the Grand Duke and appealing to his patriotism and courage. He urged on him the necessity of immediately producing to the Russian people the living image of a national leader. "If you fear to assume immediately the burden of the Imperial crown, your Highness, take at any rate the

\* Translator's Note.—It was discovered in 1929 in the archives of the Academy of Sciences at Leningrad.

† Shulgin, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

‡ Miliukov, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, Part I.



supreme power in the capacity of 'Regent of the Empire' for the time that the throne is vacant—or, what would be an even finer title, in the capacity of 'Protector of the People,' as Cromwell was called. At the same time you could give the people a solemn undertaking to hand over authority to the Constituent Assembly as soon as the war is over."\*

Michael turned out to be more sensible than was expected of him, and decided not to assume the crown out of consideration for his head. He signed an act of renunciation in the sense desired by the majority at the meeting. In drawing it up, their chief concern was to leave the way to the throne open, if possible, for members of the Romanov dynasty. But legal niceties did not help them. The Romanovs never succeeded in regaining the throne they had lost.

To-day, rewriting in exile the history of bygone days, the representatives of the bourgeoisie doubt whether they correctly solved this important problem of the end of the Romanov dynasty. At all events, they did everything possible to sustain the falling monarchy: and, if they were not successful, this of course was not their fault. Even Nicholas, in his farewell manifesto to the army, dated March 21, could express nothing but his gratitude to the bourgeoisie for its efforts. Declaring that he had renounced all power, he wrote: "Submit to the Provisional Government, obey your officers, and may God assist the Provisional Government to lead Russia along the path of glory and well-being."†

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ARREST OF THE ROMANOVs

WHILE Guchkov and Miliukov were begging Michael on their knees to assume supreme power, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, at its session of March 16, resolved to request the Provisional Government, together with the Council of Workers' Deputies, to arrest the Romanovs.

The question of how to effect the arrests was entrusted to the Military Commission of the Soviet to work out. The Executive Committee appointed its chairman, Chkheidze, and Skobelev to negotiate with the Provisional Government. For four days the Provisional Government was silent, hesitating to give a final reply to the Soviet. During this time the workers and soldiers, impatient of delay, grew

\* Paleologue, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-364.

† Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

more and more insistent on the arrests being carried out. On March 19 the Executive Committee was forced again to discuss the question, and, in order to bring pressure on the Provisional Government, took the decision "immediately to instruct the Military Commission to take steps for the arrest of Nicholas Romanov."

This had its effect on the Provisional Government. Fearing independent action by the Soviet, it decided on the very next day to "deprive Nicholas and his wife of their liberty."

Such a step on the part of the Provisional Government was still provoked not so much by the pressure of the Soviet as by the desire to preserve the life of the crowned degenerate. The best witness of this is Kerensky, who says: "The attitude of the soldiers and workmen of the Moscow and Petrograd districts was extremely hostile to Nicholas. Demands for his execution were addressed directly to me. Protesting in the name of the Government against such demands, I said privately to myself that I would never play the part of a Marat. . . . The workers' feeling of hatred was very deep-seated." This was the reason which prompted the provisional Government to arrest the Tsar and Alexandra Feodorovna. By depriving them of their liberty, the Government was thereby placing a guard over their lives.

Prince Lvov, who was at that time Prime Minister, says the same: "It was necessary to defend the former bearer of supreme authority from the possible excesses of the first torrent of revolution."\*

On March 21, representatives of the Provisional Government—Bublikov, Vershinin, Gribunin and Kalinin, members of the Duma—arrived at Mogilev, where the former Tsar was living. They announced to Nicholas, through General Alexeiev, that he was arrested and must leave for Tsarskoye Selo, where the former Tsaritsa was living with her family. During the revolutionary days the children of the Romanovs were suffering from measles, and this prevented Alexandra Feodorovna from being with Nicholas at the moment critical for the dynasty. Exercising a considerable influence over him in all affairs of State, she would hardly have allowed him to part company with the crown so easily. Like Nicholas, she continued to misunderstand events to the very end. She invariably rejected as nonsensical rumours, unworthy of attention, the warnings of her intimates that the movement which had begun threatened the very existence of the autocracy. Even when faced with facts, she stubbornly refused to believe in the possibility of a revolution. "When the valet Volkov," writes Sokolov, "pointed out that even the Cossacks in Petrograd were unreliable, she calmly replied: 'No, it is not so. There can be no revolution in Russia. The Cossacks will not turn traitor.' "†

Similarly she would not believe the announcement that Nicholas

\* Sokolov, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

† *Ibid.*, p. 9.



had abdicated. The Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovitch states that even on March 16 she knew nothing of this fact, and that when he read her the manifesto of abdication, Alexandra Feodorovna exclaimed: "I don't believe it. It is all lies, newspaper inventions. I believe in God and the army. They have not abandoned us yet."\*

A few days earlier, relying on the same God and army, she had tried to visit her husband at G.H.Q. But the stations were in the hands of the insurgent soldiers of that very army on which she pinned her hopes, and she did not succeed in meeting Nicholas for the purpose of influencing him. Then she sent him telegram after telegram, but these were returned to her with the inscription in blue pencil: "Whereabouts of addressee unknown."

At length on March 22 the addressee himself was brought to Tsarskoye Selo.

The detention of the Romanovs under arrest at Tsarskoye Selo did not by any means, of course, eliminate the danger to the life of the "anointed" and his family. This was well understood by the Provisional Government itself. The decision to arrest the Romanovs was involved in their minds with a more far-reaching plan. Even before the decision had been made, Miliukov, on the instructions of the Provisional Government, was negotiating with the British Ambassador Buchanan on the possibility of transferring the former Tsar to England. Buchanan, after making the necessary enquiries of London, reported that his Government was ready to receive the former Imperial family in Great Britain, and that a British cruiser would be sent to transport them. In a special note sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Buchanan stated that "the King and his Majesty's Government will be happy to offer the Emperor of Russia a refuge in Great Britain."†

Kerensky was entrusted with the task of transporting the Romanov family across the frontier, and he readily agreed to assume the role of saviour of the last Tsar. All these preparations for the escape of the Romanovs abroad were made in the strictest secrecy, only a few knowing of their existence. By effecting the arrest, the Provisional Government desired to lull the vigilance of the masses, in order to present them with a *fait accompli*. On the very day when the decision was taken to deprive the former Tsar and his wife of their liberty, Prince Lvov, the head of the Government, sent the following telegram to General Alexeiev at G.H.Q.: "The Provisional Government has decided to grant to the former Emperor permission to leave Tsarskoye Selo without let or hindrance in order to travel to Murmansk."‡

\* We do not know whether the promised cruiser was awaiting the

Imperial refugees in the port of Murmansk, but they did not succeed in taking advantage of the offer of the British gentlemen.

On the evening of March 22, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was informed that the Government intended secretly to "evacuate" Nicholas and his family to England. It resolved at all costs to arrest them, even though this might involve a rupture with the Provisional Government. Immediately wireless messages were sent to all towns, ordering the detention of Nicholas Romanov. Instructions were given for troops loyal to the Soviet to occupy all railway stations, while commissaries with extraordinary powers were despatched to the stations of Tsarskoye Selo, Tosno and Zvanka. In order to protect the country for the future against similar attempts to smuggle the Romanovs abroad, the Soviet decided on the Trubetskoy bastion of the fortress of Peter and Paul as their place of detention.

One of the Socialist-Revolutionaries active in the March Revolution, S. Mstislavsky, describes this page of the Russian Revolution as follows:

"At the session of the Soviet (March 22) the chairman, Chkheidze, put the following question to the vote:

"Shall we permit the departure of the Imperial family? Who is against?"

All hands went up as one, in a nervous sweep.

"If so, we must take steps to see that such attempts are made impossible once for all. The Provisional Government may try again at the first convenient moment. The Republic must be safeguarded against the Romanovs returning to the historical arena. That means that the dangerous persons must be directly in the hands of the Petrograd Soviet?" Again unanimously adopted."

Finally it was decided to send to Tsarskoye Selo a detachment of the Semenovskiy Regiment and of the machine-gunners, under Mstislavsky.

The Petrograd Soviet had accurately summed up the situation so far as the watch over the Romanovs was concerned: it was in unreliable hands. The Provisional Government had committed it to the notorious General Kornilov, who was at that time commander of the forces of the Petrograd District.

On their arrival at Tsarskoye Selo, the Soviet's plenipotentiaries met with a decisive rebuff at the hands of the local authorities.

The latter refused to hand over Nicholas, considering it their duty to carry out the instructions of General Kornilov, who had given orders that Nicholas must not be yielded up. But Mstislavsky himself was already far from this in his thoughts. The militant mood in which he had left the Soviet had evaporated, and the plenipotentiary "emissary" confined himself to an "agreement" with the guard—

\* S. Mstislavsky: *Five Days*, p. 45 (Moscow, 1922).

\* *Nicholas II and the Grand Dukes*, p. 145.

† A. Kerensky, *From Afar*, p. 191 (Paris, 1922).

‡ *Russian Chronicles*, Book V.



to check the sentries and disconnect the telephone and telegraph. However, it would have been awkward to leave Tsarskoye without seeing Romanov, and Mstislavsky demanded that the "prisoner" be shown to him. It was not easy to penetrate into the Alexandrovsky Palace to visit the "imprisoned" Romanovs. Admission was only by permits with the name of the bearer, signed by the same Kornilov. After long negotiations with the officers of the Guard, who attempted to dissuade him from such an "extraordinary measure," they finally summoned the chief Master of Ceremonies, Count Benckendorff. The old man proved still more obstinate than the officers, and flatly declared that he would not show the Emperor to mutineers. The insistence of Mstislavsky, however, and the real strength of the detachment which had come from Petrograd, finally forced the loyal subjects to make a concession and agree to an "inspection."

"I was accompanied on the 'inspection,'" writes Mstislavsky, "by the commander of the inner guard, the battalion commander, the guard officer on duty, and the orderly officer. . . . When at last the door opened with a reluctant grunt, and we entered the vestibule, we were surrounded—respectfully but inquisitively—with a crowd of courtier flunkies, who seemed fantastic on the background of the 'simple' events of those revolutionary days. A vast officer-in-waiting, as heavy as Trubetskoy's Alexander on the square, in a bearskin hat like a tub; pages; court negroes, in crimson velvet coats embroidered in gold, with turbans and sharp-pointed curved shoes; equerries in cocked hats and red capes, bordered with stamped Imperial eagles, stepping noiselessly with the soft soles of their patent-leather shoes; resplendent in snow-white gaiters, the footmen ran before us up the carpeted staircase. . . .

"Everything as it used to be, just as if in this far-off vast palace there had not sounded even a distant echo of the revolutionary storm which had swept over the country from end to end. And when, having ascended the staircase, we passed on through drawing-rooms, ante-rooms, banqueting rooms, passing from carpets to glittering parquet, and then back again to carpets which dulled the insolent ring of my spurs—at every door we found lackeys, petrified in pairs, in the most varied costumes according to the room to which they were attached: now the traditional black frock-coats, now Polish surcoats, black, white, red shoes, stockings and gaiters. And at one of the doors we found two handsome lackeys with ridiculous crimson scarves on their heads, caught up with tinsel clasps, and frock coats with white shoes and stockings.

"In the upper corridor (under the glass roof), which had been transformed into a picture gallery, we found a small crowd of courtiers awaiting us, Benckendorff at their head. The courtiers were in black coats buttoned up to the chin. Six or eight paces from the place we met

the retinue, another corridor crossed ours at right angles: it was along this that the former Emperor was to come out to me.

"I took my stand in the middle of the corridor, Benckendorff to my right, Dolgorukov on my left, with another whom I did not know by sight. A little way behind me stood the officers who had come with me.

"Somewhere to the side a lock clicked. Benckendorff grew silent and with trembling hands smoothed his grey whiskers. The officers sprang to attention, hastily buttoning up their gloves. Rapid steps with the faint ring of spurs were heard.

"He (Romanov) was in a khaki summer tunic of the Life Hussars, without a cap. Twitching his shoulder as always and rubbing his hands as though washing them, he stopped at the point where the corridors met and turned his face towards us—bloated and red, with swollen, inflamed eyelids, surrounding in a heavy frame the dull, leaden, bloodshot eyes. After standing awhile as though in indecision, he rubbed his hands again and moved towards us. It seemed as though he was going to speak. We looked one another straight in the eyes, coming nearer at his every step. There was dead silence. The fixed yellow features of the Emperor, which resembled those of a tired, harassed wolf, suddenly lit up: in the depths of his pupils there blazed up a vivid, deadly hatred, which as it were melted their leaden indifference for an instant. . . .

"Nicholas stopped, stood first on one foot then on another, and, turning round sharply, went back, twitching his shoulder and limping.

"I freed my right hand, which had been tucked into my belt, raised it to my fur cap in parting from the courtiers, and, speeded by the hissing and foaming of Benckendorff, retraced my steps. My companions maintained a crushed silence. And only in the vestibule one of them, reproachfully shaking his head, said: 'It was wrong of you not to take off your cap. His Majesty looked as though he wanted to speak to you, but when he saw how you were standing. . . .' And another added: 'Well, now look out. If ever the Romanovs come to the throne again, you will remember that minute: they will find you even at the bottom of the sea.'"\*

The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who at that time dominated the Petrograd Soviet, proved true to themselves as always: loud words about committing Nicholas to the Trubetskoy bastion of the fortress of Peter and Paul, a bold plan for a descent on Tsarskoye Selo, and . . . an inspection of the arrested Tsar in his own palace.

Still, the detention of the Romanovs under arrest was from that time onwards under the control, to a certain extent, of the Petrograd Soviet.

\* S. Mstislavsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.



The Government was forced to reckon with the actions of the Soviet, and temporarily to give up the fulfilment of its intentions of smuggling the Romanovs away to England.

## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE OLD NEST

FROM March 22 the whole family was under "arrest" in the Alexandrovsky Palace at Tsarskoye Selo, formerly the permanent residence of the Imperial family in pre-revolutionary years.

Tsarskoye Selo (now Detskoye Selo—the "children's village") is a small town about thirteen miles south of Petrograd. The Alexandrovsky Palace, situated in a park, is near the Great Palace, in which Catherine II lived. The Imperial family occupied one of the wings, while the main palace, in which were situated the reception rooms, was unoccupied. Their suite took up their residence in another wing. Count and Countess Benckendorff, the Lady-in-Waiting, Baroness Buxhoeveden, Countess Hendrikova, the lady reader Schneider, Count Frederiks, Prince Dolgorukov (Chief Marshal of the Court), the tutors Gilliard and Gibbs, Doctor Botkin and a few others shared the confinement of the former Imperial family.

The detention of the Romanovs at Tsarskoye Selo did little to assure the masses. They continued to insist on more severe treatment for the former Imperial family, as the best safeguard for the revolution against possible attempts at a Monarchist restoration. "The execution of Nicholas II and the transference of his family from the Alexandrovsky Palace to the fortress of Peter and Paul or to Kronstadt," writes Kerensky in his memoirs, "these were the furious, sometimes frenzied, demands of hundreds of delegations, deputations, and resolutions which poured in upon the Provisional Government, and in particularly upon myself as the Minister responsible for the safekeeping of the Imperial family."\* Naturally, the Provisional Government and the Kerensky himself were deaf to such demands of the masses, and furthermore the Provisional Government, even after its formal abandonment of the plan to send the Romanovs abroad, continued its secret negotiations, through Miliukov, with the British Government on this question. When Miliukov resigned in April, Kerensky states that negotiations for removing to England the inhabitants of the Alexandrovsky Palace "were continued with even greater determina-

\* A. Kerensky : *From Afar*, p. 187.

tion by his successor, M. I. Tereschenko."\* However, in June the Provisional Government met with an unexpected disappointment : the British Government officially informed it that, pending the termination of the war, it was impossible to receive the ex-Tsar and his family within the confines of the British Empire.

Apparently the Romanovs were acquainted with all these negotiations behind the scenes, but the longer that negotiations continued the less hopes they maintained of seeing the promised shores of Great Britain. Gilliard writes in his reminiscences : " We thought that our imprisonment at Tsarskoye Selo would be of short duration, and awaited our embarkation for England. But the days passed, and our departure was constantly postponed. . . . We were only a few hours' journey from the Finnish frontier, and Petrograd was the only serious obstacle. It seemed to us, therefore, that by energetic and secret action we could without great difficulty reach one of the Finnish ports, and thereafter escort the Imperial family abroad. But none would take the responsibility, and every one feared to compromise himself."†

In anticipation of assistance from their "loyal and devoted subjects," the Romanovs continued an uneventful existence. Twice a day—from 11 to 12 in the morning, from 2.30 to five in the afternoon, the family went out for exercise under the escort of soldiers of the Palace guard, drawn from reserve units of the First, Second and Fourth Guards Regiments. For recreation they chopped wood, broke up ice, swept the snow, and in the summer worked in the garden. There were no particular restrictions in their home life. The restrictions only applied out of doors and in the park, where the prisoners were not allowed to stir a step beyond the area fixed for their recreation.

The new surroundings made little impression upon Nicholas. Just as at the moment of abdication, he resembled a man with an obviously lowered sensitiveness and intelligence. Paleologue, relying on the reports of extremely well-informed persons, wrote in his diary on April 11 : "The Emperor is still unusually indifferent and calm. He spends the day carelessly and peacefully in reading the papers, smoking cigarettes, playing patience or with the children. He seems almost to experience a certain satisfaction from being relieved at last of the burden of power."‡

The life of the Palace was varied from time to time by the visits of Kerensky, who came to check the guard and converse with the Tsar and his family. The surviving associates of the Romanov family bear witness to his great concern for the welfare of the prisoners, his frequent enquiries after their health, whether they suffered from any restrictions or insults at the hands of the soldiers, etc. His visits, of

\* *Ibid*, p. 192.

† P. Gilliard : *The Tragic Fate of the Russian Imperial Family*, p. 45 (Reval, 1921).

‡ M. Paleologue, *op. cit.*, pp. 432-33.



which there were eight or ten, always made the best possible impression upon the whole Imperial family and its attendants. Even Alexandra Feodorovna, who behaved with great arrogance and contempt to all surrounding her, said on one occasion to Volkov, the Court Chamberlain, "He is not a bad sort. He is a good fellow. One can talk to him."\* But soon this friendly idyll which had sprung up between the "Imperial captives" and the first "Socialist Minister" came to an end.

The July events came. They had no immediate effect on the life of the Palace. It continued, quiet and peaceful, as before. But, in spite of the suppression of the July Demonstration, the general political situation in the country became more and more threatening for the Provisional Government, and therefore for the lives of the Romanovs.

"In the summer, in the first half of July," writes Lvov, "the Government arrived at the conviction that the presence of the Imperial family near Petrograd had become impossible: the country was obviously on the decline." Concerned for the preservation of the Imperial family, the Provisional Government decided to remove it from Tsarskoye to a more secluded spot, further from Bolshevik Petrograd and Kronstadt.

The necessity for such measures grew all the more obvious, in the eyes of the Provisional Government, because the "demoralisation" which had begun in the army also affected the garrison of Tsarskoye Selo. "Tsarskoye was the most sensitive spot of all for us of the Provisional Government," writes Kerensky. "The Bolsheviks carried on the most sedulous propaganda amongst the soldiers on guard there and demoralised them. The attitude of the soldiers was one of strained distrust. Merely because the officer of the guard, in accordance with an old Palace custom, received a half-bottle of wine from the Imperial cellars, and this came to the ears of the soldiers, there was a great scandal. The careless driving of some chauffeur who damaged the park railings with his car produced suspicion and rumours among the soldiers that there was a plot to carry off the Tsar. All this created a bad atmosphere . . . and deprived us of our real force, the Tsarskoye Selo garrison, which we had looked upon as a bulwark against the demoralised soldiery of Petrograd."

But the chief motive for transferring the Romanov family from Tsarskoye was nevertheless not these apprehensions. This, by the way, is pointed out by Gilliard in his reminiscences. He writes that, when Kerensky informed Nicholas of the Provisional Government's decision, he explained at the same time that it was necessary because the Government had decided on the most energetic measures against the Bolsheviks. As a result, he said, there were bound to be armed conflicts, in which the Imperial family might fall the first victims,

and therefore he, Kerensky, felt it his duty to protect them against any such possibility.\* Subsequent events in Petrograd partially confirmed this statement.

The Provisional Government selected Tobolsk as the place to which Nicholas should be transferred. Its remoteness from the principal centres of political struggle made it a most convenient spot, in which the Romanovs could live in peace and the hope of better times. True, the Romanovs themselves preferred the south, to cold and distant Siberia, and during one of Kerensky's visits they raised with him the question of their transfer to Livadia (the Imperial villa), in the Crimea. Kerensky replied that at present it was quite impossible. It will be understood that he refused this request of the Romanovs, not because he personally was unwilling, but because the workers and soldiers would not have allowed it. By fixing on Tobolsk, where for many years the Romanovs themselves had exiled revolutionaries to certain death, the Provisional Government might still hope that the masses would not interfere with its plan. It would seem that this motive played no minor part in the decision to remove the Imperial family to Tobolsk.

In the early part of August, Kerensky came to Tsarskoye and held a conference with the officers of the guard on the subject of the journey. The conference was held in secret, and only a very limited circle knew of its decisions. Three companies of six officers and 330 other ranks, nearly all non-commissioned officers who had been at the front, and Chevaliers of St. George, were fixed upon. They were served out with new uniforms and new rifles, and personally inspected by Kerensky, who promised that all members of the detachment would receive special service pay during the whole period of their engagement—the purpose of which, however, was not revealed. Colonel Kobylinsky, the commander of the guard, was appointed to take charge of the detachment. This figure once again emphasizes how little concerned was the Provisional Government for the detention in custody of the Romanov family, and how in reality it was enabling them to escape from Tobolsk.

Gilliard, who knew Kobylinsky well, and knew well also the circumstances in which he had to work, writes in his reminiscences: "No one thought that, in spite of the revolution and of his service, as it were, in the enemy's camp, he continued truly and faithfully to serve his Majesty the Emperor, suffering the rudeness and the insolence of the guard. Kobylinsky did everything he could for the Imperial family, and it is not his fault if the short-sighted monarchist organisers did not appeal to him—the only man who had ample opportunity to organise the liberation of the Imperial family, and was only awaiting

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

\* P. Gilliard, *op. cit.*, p. 52.



that help from outside which he himself could not summon, subjected as he was to the constant vigilance of his hostile soldiers."

By his "true and faithful service," Kobylnsky soon won the good graces of the Imperial family, who saw in him one of themselves rather than a commander of the guard. Before departure, Nicholas gratefully wrote in his diary: "Kobylnsky is my best friend."

On August 12 the Imperial family were informed of their forthcoming departure. In the evening Kerensky and Michael Alexandrovitch came to say good-bye. Kerensky delivered a parting speech, suitable to the occasion, to the soldiers of the escort: "Remember," he said, "we do not hit a man when he is down. Behave politely, not as ruffians. Don't forget he was formerly the Emperor. Neither he nor his family must suffer the want of anything."\*

On the morning of August 14 the Imperial family were transported in motor-cars, under the escort of dragoons of the Third Baltic Regiment, to the Alexandrovsky Station. On the same day, two trains under the Japanese flag bore the Tsar and his guards away to Siberia. "The Japanese Red Cross Mission" was the legend on the magnificent international sleeping-cars of the trains which tore headlong on the road to the Urals.

There travelled with the Imperial family Prince Dolgorukov, Tatischev, Doctor Botkin, the tutor Gilliard, and Countess Hendrikova. In addition, the Romanovs were accompanied by a numerous staff of servants, beginning with Nicholas' valet and ending with the kitchen-boy—thirty-five in all. Their distribution according to rank and profession was as follows: three valets, eight footmen, three cooks, one kitchen-boy, one butler, three kitchen-maids, one steward, three maids, two chambermaids, two nurses, two waiters, one writer, one hairdresser, one wardrobe-keeper, one lady reader, one governess. History probably can record no criminal furnished by his jailers with such a vast staff of servants as Nicholas enjoyed with the personal consent of Kerensky. This petty-bourgeois revolutionary cherished a truly lackey-like respect for the worst enemy of the people.

On the journey the Imperial family were accompanied by two representatives of the Provisional Government—Makarov and Vershinin. Every precaution was taken to prevent any incident on the way. The stations at which the trains halted were surrounded with a wide circle of troops from the local garrisons, and the general public and unnecessary railway employees temporarily excluded. No one was allowed out of the carriages at these halts.

In spite of all the precautions, the trains were stopped at two stations in order that their destination could be ascertained. At Zvanka the local railwaymen demanded an explanation, but quietly let the trains pass when they heard who was in them. At Peron a representative of

\* Wilton: *The Last Days of the Romanovs* (Berlin), p. 56.

the local authorities demanded that the commissaries of the Provisional Government should show their mandates and explain the purpose of the special trains. Here, too, Kerensky's signature had the effect of allaying suspicion, and the trains were allowed to continue their journey.

On the evening of August 17 they arrived at Tiumen, and the Romanovs were immediately transferred to the quayside by the river Tobol, where three steam-boats were in waiting: two large boats—the *Rus* and *Kormiletz*—and one steam-tug. The officers of the local garrison, headed by the commandant, were on parade at the entry to the quay, and saluted the ex-Tsar and his family when the latter were leaving their carriages.

The Imperial family and part of the guard were placed on the *Rus*, the remainder of the guard on the *Kormiletz*, while the tug served to maintain communications. By the morning all the luggage had been shipped, and at 5 a.m. on the 18th the steamers began their journey down the Tobol, towards Tobolsk. On the way they passed the village of Pokrovskoye, the birth-place of the Imperial family's "Friend"—Gregory Rasputin. The venerable man's house stood out from amongst the ordinary peasant's huts by reason of its size and its town style of architecture, and could be easily descried from the river. The Imperial family gathered on the deck while passing this spot and exchanged animated reminiscences of their departed "Friend."

They arrived at Tobolsk on the evening of the 19th. The house set aside for the ex-Tsar and his guard was being redecorated, and some days, therefore, had to be spent on board. During this enforced delay, the polite commissaries of the Provisional Government arranged an excursion up the river to the Aballaksky Monastery. Here a special service was organised for the Imperial family, in which they took part, surrounded by a sighing and weeping congregation.

Only on August 26 was the debarkation begun.

## CHAPTER V

### AT TOBOLSK

TOBOLSK, one of the oldest towns of Western Siberia, served for years as one of the "remote provinces" to which the Russian Tsars used to exile courtiers involved in palace intrigues and revolutions, and, later on, the best leaders of the working class.

The town stands at the confluence of the Tobol and the Irtysh, from



which point there is a direct waterway to Obdorsk and the Arctic. Overland communications in the summer are bad, passing through tundra and swamps, but the winter road, with the help of reindeer, makes possible extensive connections with the Siberian towns. Tobolsk is linked to Tiumen, the nearest railway station, by fairly good waterways in summer, but separated by hundreds of miles of sledge path in the winter.

While fairly active as a commercial centre and halfway-house between European factory industry and the furs and fish of the far north, Tobolsk politically was always backward and reactionary.

After the March Revolution, a Soviet was set up here as everywhere else in Russia. Its majority was composed of Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, for the most part exiles who for one reason or another had remained in Tobolsk. The Soviet had little influence, and power *de facto* was entirely in the hands of the provincial commissary of the Provisional Government and of the Town Council.

In the summer of 1917, before the Romanovs arrived, there existed in the town a united Social-Democratic organisation\* which carried on a certain amount of propaganda amongst the semi-proletarian craftsmen. There were, in fact, very few Bolsheviks at Tobolsk, and only by August did they succeed in establishing a small group.

With the arrival of the Romanovs and their guards the Soviet and the local authorities faded into the background: those entrusted with the care of the former Tsar became all-powerful.

The Romanovs took up their quarters in a large and roomy house, formerly the Governor's, on Liberty Street, so renamed after the Revolution. Their retinue were allotted a dwelling opposite, in what was formerly the house of a merchant, Kornilov.

On the very first day after their arrival at Tobolsk there took place an incident which immediately produced strained relations between the guard and the prisoners. During the day the whole family, with their suite and accompanied by the representatives of the Provisional Government, went over to the Kornilov house unattended by any guard, and remained there for a long time inspecting the accommodation. A special meeting of the detachment was immediately held, at which Vershinin and Makarov were requested to explain why they had allowed this freedom to the former Imperial family. The alarmed representatives of the Provisional Government justified their action by referring to their instructions. From their explanations, it would seem that the instructions were to guard the Romanovs exclusively for their personal safety, and not as prisoners. This caused serious discontent among the soldiers. A resolution was passed not to take any notice of the Government's instructions. Vershinin and Makarov were requested to confine Nicholas Romanov under close guard, for which

\* I.e.—One of which both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were members. (Translator).

purpose sentries should be posted around and inside the house, additional posts established at night, and pickets in three shifts to patrol the adjoining streets. It was further decided immediately to begin the erection of a high fence, to enclose the house and the grounds, in which Nicholas and his family could walk twice daily—from ten to twelve and from two to four. It was further resolved to permit the Romanovs once a week, under armed guard, to visit the Church of Intercession of the Virgin close by.

The demands of the general meeting were accepted by the Government representatives, and that very day the fence was begun and the sentries were posted.

After two or three days, Vershinin and Makarov left for Petrograd. Shortly after their departure, Pankratov, a Socialist-Revolutionary, who had just been appointed commissary of the Provisional Government, arrived in their place. As from September 1 the whole detachment came under his command, including Colonel Kobylinsky. Pankratov held a fairly peculiar view of his position as commissary. In this respect his first meeting with the Imperial family, described by himself is very characteristic.

"On September 2," he relates, "I visited the Governor's house. Not wishing to infringe the rules of politeness, I requested the valet of the former Tsar to report my arrival and to state that I wished to see his master. . . ."

"'Good morning,' said Nicholas Alexandrovitch, stretching out his hand. 'Did you have a good journey?'"

"'Thank you, yes,' I replied, grasping his hand."

"'How is Alexander Feodorovitch Kerensky?' asked the former Tsar."

"There was a note of genuine sincerity, combined with sympathy and even gratitude" (as well there might be) "in this question. I replied briefly, and asked after the health of the former Tsar and all his family."

"'Not bad, thank God,' he replied."

"After this exchange of mutual courtesies and enquiries after one another's health, the conversation turned to 'business.'"

"'Could you not allow me to saw wood?' he asked suddenly. 'I like that kind of work.'"

"'Perhaps you would like to have a carpenter's shop? It is more interesting work,' I suggested."

"'No, just see that they bring some logs into the yard and give me a saw,' replied Nicholas Alexandrovitch."

"'To-morrow it shall be done.'"

"'May I correspond with my relatives?'"

"'Certainly. Have you enough books?'"

"'Plenty, but why do we not receive our foreign journals; is this forbidden?'"



" 'Probably it is the fault of the post. I shall make enquiries. In any case your papers and journals shall not be held up.'"

" 'Will it not be cold here in the winter? It is a big room,' said the former Tsar.

" 'We must try and prevent that. I shall have all the stores examined and put right. There is sufficient fuel,' I said.

" 'If you have any requests, please inform me,' I said, taking my leave."\*

The care and forethought displayed by the new commissary at their first meeting were not accidental. They were fully in keeping with the instructions of the Provisional Government, and with the farewell speech of Kerensky himself before the detachment left for Tobolsk. During his tenure of office, Pankratov conscientiously observed the orders of his party colleague. True, in his zeal, he far outstripped the latter in servility, so that occasionally it was difficult to distinguish the commissary of the Provisional Government from a chief steward or other familiar of the Romanov family.

A Mme. Ersberg, who was with them at Tobolsk, writes about him in the following strain: "He was a kind and sincere man. He was well-disposed towards them and obviously pitied them. He liked the Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna particularly. Once she fell and hurt her eye. . . . When he heard of it, he came up immediately and was visibly disturbed. His attitude towards the ill-health of Alexei Nikolaevitch was similar. He was also most attentive to the Tsar. Sometimes he called on us and would tell the Grand Duchesses and Alexei Nikolaevitch about his exile in Siberia. They loved to listen to him."†

Under the watchful eye of this "kind and sincere" commissary, the life of the Imperial family, surrounded with the cares of their numerous suite and the commissary himself, proceeded in calm and orderly fashion according to the regulations. The family had no lack of funds, as the Romanovs could at that period dispose freely of their vast resources. At the most modest estimate, the sums to their credit amounted to over 14 million roubles. This rendered possible pleasant conditions not only for the family, but for all their numerous servants.

One of the soldiers, P.M. Matveyev, writes of this blissful state as follows: "All the Romanovs' requirements in foodstuffs were bought in the market. If anything could not be procured there—sugar, for example—the offerings of the nuns from surrounding convents more than covered the deficiency. For the honour of drinking coffee in the former Tsar's kitchen these 'blacktails' came from nunneries far and wide with innumerable presents in the form of sugar, butter, cream,

\* V. Pankratov: *With the Tsar at Tobolsk* (Byloe, No. 25, 1924, pp. 199-200).

† N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

eggs and other delicacies. There could be no talk of payment, of course."\*

Maintaining close contact with all their friends, the Romanovs in their turn saw to their welfare. In the correspondence between Alexandra and Vyrubova we find, almost in every letter: "I am sending macaroni, sausages and coffee, though it is Lent": "I am sending you some more flour; I hope the provisions I sent you through the Loshkarevs and Krarup," etc.† This shows that the connections between the family and the capital, whither special "volunteer courtiers," carrying mail and parcels, constantly travelled, were extremely well organised. This can incidentally be judged from the following incident. On one occasion a cargo of several chests, addressed to the Romanovs, arrived at Tobolsk. Colonel Kobylinsky requested the soldiers, for special pay, to unload the chests. Some of the heavy boxes were labelled: "Crockery," "Warm clothes," "Fruit," etc. In unloading, one of the boxes was broken, and was found to contain twenty quarters of spirits. The soldiers then decided to open the other chests. One of them was found to contain spirits, the remainder wines. This caused considerable feeling among the soldiers and the local inhabitants. All the wine and spirits were immediately poured into the Irtysh.

The Romanovs were very displeased with this, although, according to the guards, they had no lack of spirituous liquors; wine was always served at dinner, and a decanter of vodka for Nicholas.

Their friends also concerned themselves with the "spiritual food" of the prisoners, sending them books, journals and newspapers. "In addition to the Russian newspapers, Nicholas received English and French newspapers and magazines. Someone, who evidently knew the tastes of the former Tsar, used to send him very frivolous little journals."‡

The family passed the day in the garden, playing "gorodki," or sawing timber, for which purpose saws and hatchets were bought and logs brought in.

"In the evening," writes Gilliard, "all their friends gathered in the circle of the Imperial family. . . . Games were organised and every way attempted of dissipating the painful monotony of their life in captivity. The Emperor often read aloud, while the Grand Duchesses were engaged in some handiwork or playing with us. The Empress usually played one or two games of bezique with General Tatischev, and then took up some work in her turn, or else stretched herself out in an arm-chair. And in this peaceful, purely family atmosphere we passed the long winter evenings."§

\* From the unpublished manuscript of P. M. Matveyev: *Tsarskoye Selo-Tobolsk-Ekaterinburg*.

† Vyrubova: *Memoirs*, p. 162.

‡ Pankratov, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

§ Gilliard, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.



As we see, life in exile at Tobolsk was not so bad. All the surviving intimates of the Romanovs who were there remark that the first six weeks or two months at Tobolsk were the best passed by the Imperial family during their whole imprisonment. According to their own words, the conditions were sufficiently close to those prevailing at Tsarskoye Selo, and the prisoners received all that was necessary.

If the soldiers of the guard on the very first day had not limited the territory of the former Imperial "Court" to the courtyard of the house, the Romanovs' stay at Tobolsk would have borne little resemblance to imprisonment. They might have passed their days, anticipating an early deliverance, far better than at Tsarskoye Selo.

Nicholas and his family, both personally and through their retinue, showed great persistence in asking for permission, not only to attend church, but to visit the town and the neighbouring country. They made such requests of Pankratov more than once. Personally he himself had nothing against such excursions, but he had to reckon with the hostility of the guard and the local population to any relaxation of the prison regime. This was the chief reason which led the "kind and sincere" commissary on every occasion to refuse the Romanovs' request. Had the attitude of the soldiers and the people been any different, he would certainly have granted it.

In his reminiscences, Pankratov records the following interesting conversation with Nicholas on this subject:

"I want to ask you to allow me to see the town with my family."

"I should do so most willingly, had I the permission of the Provisional Government. Besides, there are other reasons."

"You are afraid I will escape?" Nicholas Alexandrovitch interrupts me.

"Least of all that," I reply. "I am certain you would not even attempt such a thing."\*

One has to be a very simple person like Pankratov to express such certainty that even an attempt to escape on the part of the Romanovs is impossible. It was just at this moment that a number of monarchist organisations and groups were beginning to lay plans to carry off the Imperial family. The commissary of the Provisional Government was so ridiculous in his naivete that even the Imperial family were laughing up their sleeves at him. Even such a limited and dull intelligence as Nicholas, in spite of all his "sympathy and even gratitude" to Pankratov, treated him ironically, calling him "the little fellow" (Pankratov was not very tall).

And, if the Romanovs did not manage to escape after all, we shall see later that this could least of all be laid at Pankratov's door. On the contrary, by his behaviour he did all he could to procure the success of the flight.

\* Pankratov, *op. cit.*

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HERMOGENES AFFAIR

CLOSELY linked with the stay of the Imperial family at Tobolsk is the activity of one of the most prominent Russian monarchist ecclesiastics—Bishop Hermogenes.

Hermogenes was the closest confidant and lieutenant of Rasputin, and was widely known throughout Russia as a friend of the Imperial family. After the revolution he was left at liberty. As is well known, the Provisional Government was extremely tolerant and even sympathetic towards this species of open monarchist, sometimes even appointing them to new responsible posts.

Hermogenes was also not forgotten. The new "revolutionary" High Procurator of the Holy Synod, V. N. Lvov, appointed him Bishop of Tobolsk. This appointment took place before the transfer of the Romanovs, but, as has since transpired, had a definite object. On his arrival at Tobolsk, Hermogenes began prolonged negotiations with Petrograd for the transfer thither of the Romanovs, negotiations which actually ended successfully.

The few individual revolutionaries organised in the Tobolsk Soviet realised what part this monk might play in organising plots to set free the Romanovs. They drew the attention of the Government to this on more than one occasion. But all such attempts failed. The Provisional Government thought fit to maintain a discreet silence.

Very soon after the arrival of the Romanovs, former officers under assumed names began to assemble—for "rest" or "recreation," as they replied to the enquiries of the local authorities, who attempted to ascertain the reasons for these suspicious "guests" coming into the Tobolsk backwoods.

Most of them apparently arrived with false documents. Two officers, for example, who had arrived for two weeks' leave from the front, were called "Kyrillov" and "Mefodiev."\* Another two officers arrested were, according to their documents, the brothers Raeovsky. One of them arrived in Tobolsk first, and was under observation. The second "brother," immediately on arrival, without visiting his brother, called on Hermogenes. He was arrested on leaving the latter's house. A certificate was found on him issued by the "All-Russian Brotherhood of Orthodox Congregations." Under cross-examination he stated that he had brought Hermogenes a letter from Nestor, Bishop of Kamchatka. Later, when a search was made at Hermogenes' house, it was discovered that the letter brought by Raeovsky was from the former Dowager-Empress, Maria Feodorovna,†

\* Kyril and Mefodi (Cyril and Methodius) were the two missionaries to the Slavs to whom tradition ascribes the introduction of the Slavonic alphabet. (Translator.)

† Died at Copenhagen, 1929. (Translator.)



pressing Hermogenes to take charge of the plans to set free the Imperial family, as a preliminary to the restoration of the monarchy: "My Lord," she wrote, "you bear the name of St. Hermogenes, who fought for Russia: it is an omen. . . . The hour has come for you to save the Motherland, all Russia knows you: appeal, expose, condemn. May your name be glorified in the salvation of long-suffering Russia."

And Hermogenes began to glorify.

The Romanov family went to church in the mornings, when the streets were more empty. A special service was arranged for them. On November 3, the day of the old Imperial holiday—the succession of Nicholas Romanov to the throne—at the moment the family was leaving the church after the usual service, all the bells of the churches began to peal as though on a church holiday, and so continued until the family had entered their house. This was by order of the priest Alexei Vasiliev, who thus repeated the traditional ceremony attending the "outgoing of their Majesties." The incident caused some talk among the soldiers, but matters did not go any further.

In November an unknown monk was already distributing leaflets in the Cathedral, the barracks and the streets, calling on the people to help "our father, the Tsar," and "to make a stand for the Russian Orthodox faith." Simultaneously there suddenly appeared in the church attended by the Romanovs the "wonderworking ikon" of the Abalaksky Monastery. This ikon was usually transported to Tobolsk in summer-time, with special pomp and ceremony. Its "appearance" at Tobolsk at an unusual time was intended, apparently, to serve as a sort of "miracle." The Soviet had to interfere most emphatically before the ikon would "go" back to the monastery.

Finally, on December 6 (old style), at the same church, during the presence of the Imperial family, the deacon made the old invocation of "long years of life to the reigning House," naming the Tsar, his wife, the Heir-Apparent and their daughters by their former titles in full. This attempt of the monarchists to assume the offensive quite openly caused great dissatisfaction and indignation among the soldiers and the more revolutionary circles of Tobolsk. The Romanovs were deprived of the right to attend church, and were requested to pray in future at home. The deacon Yevdokimov and the priest Vassiliev were arrested and brought to the Soviet.

Under examination they told a confused story, each throwing the blame on the other, but the directing hand of Hermogenes could be felt behind them. The Soviet did not show the necessary firmness in this matter, leaving both priest and deacon at their homes under "domestic arrest." Without the sanction of the Soviet, Hermogenes liberated them and sent them to "do penance" in a monastery. There began a long correspondence with Hermogenes, who evaded a request to give evidence in person. In his letter to the Soviet, Hermogenes

went into philosophical disquisitions and quotations from the Fathers to show that "from the Holy Writ, public law, the Church Canons and canon law, and likewise from the evidence of history, former kings, tsars and emperors deprived of the governance of their country do not lose their dignity, as such, and therefore the appropriate titles"; hence he did not and does not consider the conduct of the priest Vassiliev to be "criminal."

All the activity of Hermogenes amounted, in the main, to this mobilisation of feeling amongst the religiously-inclined section of the Tobolsk population, i.e., chiefly the merchants, tradesmen, well-to-do peasants and similar reactionary and "Black Hundred" elements. Any direct attempt to liberate the Romanovs proved, apparently, beyond his powers.

At one time, it is true, he attempted to make use of the "War Veterans League" which was formed at Tobolsk. At the head of this League, which was under the patronage of the merchant element, stood a certain Lepilin. He gave himself out to be a political exile, but it soon transpired that he was a habitual thief, blackmailer and *provocateur*, in whom even the Secret Police had lost all faith. Hermogenes made the League a grant of several thousand roubles, and thereby won great popularity in the organisation which was always ready to follow whoever gave most. But this was the sum-total of his relations with the League, as might have been expected. Hermogenes was too prominent a figure in Tobolsk to be able to take a more active part in such a risky undertaking.

But Hermogenes was not alone in his attempts to assist the Imperial family. Various monarchist organisations, groups and circles in the capital got to work directly the Romanovs arrived at Tobolsk. While they were detained at Tsarskoye Selo, close to revolutionary Petrograd and Kronstadt, there could be no thought of any attempt—the case was too hopeless. The monarchists themselves very soon recognised this. The leader of the Russian monarchists, the well-known Markov II, relates: "During their imprisonment at Tsarskoye Selo, I tried to get into touch with his Majesty the Emperor. In a note I sent through Julia Alexandrovna Den, the wife of a naval Officer, very devoted to the Empress and one of the Court ladies, I informed his Majesty of my desire to serve the Imperial family and to do everything possible to mitigate its sufferings. I asked the Emperor to let me know through Den whether he approved of my intentions, by sending me an ikon. The Tsar approved of my wishes: he sent me through Den the image of St. Nicholas."\*

From further accounts it is clear that this first attempt to establish contact between the monarchists and the Romanovs did not go further than "St. Nicholas," as, in the words of another prominent

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 95.



monarchist, N. Sokolov, they "could undertake nothing during the first months after the Tsar's abdication owing to the general situation: the Right monarchists were subjected to persecutions more than any others."

This explanation of the monarchists' passivity is pure nonsense. It was not that they were subjected as alleged to some kind of persecution (the Provisional Government was least of all inclined to persecute them), but that the Romanovs were under the watchful eye of the soldiers and workers of Petrograd.

With the transfer to Tobolsk, the situation was completely changed. Instead of Petrograd and Kronstadt with their workers and soldiers, there was a nest of Siberian well-to-do peasantry, a spot far away from the revolutionary proletarian centres, a direct road to England. All this could not but revive among the monarchists attractive prospects of liberating their adored monarch.

It was no accident that precisely in the autumn began active operations on the part of the monarchists with a view to setting free the Romanovs. Markov II states: "After long but enforced inactivity, we decided in September to send our representative to Tobolsk to establish contact with the Imperial family and, should circumstances require it, to carry them off. Our choice fell on N, an officer of the Crimean Regiment, whose Colonel-in-Chief was the Empress. He was a man sincerely and profoundly devoted to their Majesties. He was personally well known to her Majesty the Empress. The Tsar also knew him. . . .

"He left, I think, in September 1917, and informed us of his arrival at Tiumen. . . . We began to think of other officers to send to Tobolsk. Markov was despatched."\*

Even before the monarchist organisation led by Markov II, preparatory steps with the same end in view were made by Mme. Vyrubova's "Rasputin Circle." A certain Boris Soloviev, son of the Treasurer of the Holy Synod and an old friend of Rasputin's, was put in charge. Soloviev had been a member of the Rasputin Circle since 1915. During the Revolution he turned up in the Duma building with the 2nd Machine-gun Regiment, and was appointed adjutant to Polovtzev, the chairman of the Military Commission of the Duma Committee. However, he did not break off connections with the Rasputin Circle, but on the contrary continued to be an active member.

In August 1917, when the Imperial family was already at Tobolsk, Soloviev went there on the instructions of the Circle. Here he tried to establish relations with Bishop Hermogenes, who had already "made contact" with the Romanovs. Shortly afterwards he married Matryona Rasputin, daughter of the monk, and, after a brief absence,

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97.

returned to Tobolsk. The extracts from the diaries of both husband and wife which have been published by Sokolov show that their marriage took place only for considerations of a "business character." For Soloviev it meant that he returned to Tobolsk as a relative of the Rasputin family, and therefore would be less likely to attract the suspicions of the local authorities, notwithstanding that he was a former officer. He could settle down quietly near the place where the former Imperial family were confined, and make his preparations undisturbed. The young couple stayed at first with Rasputin's widow at Pokrovsk. Soon, however, Soloviev selected Tiumen as his main residence, as a town conveniently situated for the surveillance of all coming to and from Tobolsk. He lived here under the name of Stanislas Korjenevsky.

Once settled at Tiumen, Soloviev established communications with the former Empress, and soon became an intermediary between her and the Rasputin Circle, transmitting letters, money and parcels to and from Tobolsk and Leningrad. At Tobolsk there lived two maids of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna's, Utkina and Romanova, who had not been included in the list of servants and had arrived at Tobolsk after the Imperial family. They lived by themselves in private apartments. They were both devotees of Rasputin's, and through them Soloviev was able to establish contact with the former Tsaritsa. The latter trusted him both as Rasputin's son-in-law and as the emissary of Vyrubova's "Rasputin Circle."

Thus by the beginning of October the monarchist groups and circles had succeeded in establishing bases of operations for setting the Romanovs free.

If the escape of the Romanovs did not materialise, this is to be explained, as we shall see below, by the fact that its immediate organisers could not arrive at a satisfactory division among themselves of the vast sums which poured in for the purpose from Moscow, and came to mutual abuse and fisticuffs, losing completely out of sight the "adored person" of the monarch. No small part was played also by the circumstance that, after the November Revolution, control over the guard of the former Tsar passed from Kobylinsky and Pankratov to the Soldiers' Committee. Had it not been for this, the Romanovs would probably have succeeded in escaping execution.



## CHAPTER VII

### TOBOLSK AFTER THE NOVEMBER REVOLUTION

TOBOLSK learned of the November Revolution a full fortnight after it had taken place, while the real meaning of the event was realised much later. The explanation is the general political situation at the time. For a long time the whole machinery of communications—the telegraphs and the railways—was under the control of organisations hostile to the Bolsheviks. The “Vikjel” (the All-Russian Executive Committee of Railwaymen), the “Peasant League” and other organisations supporting the Provisional Government, caused confusion in many distant parts of the country by their lying telegrams about the struggle in Petrograd. Tobolsk was among these districts, and for a long time knew nothing of the true state of affairs. This was helped on, of course, by the work of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries who at that time controlled the Tobolsk Soviet.

When the situation had been cleared up, contact with the capital restored, and the first decrees and regulations began to arrive, the Soviet again made an attempt to set up a Coalition Committee of the Town Council and Soviet: but nothing came of it. Until the first workers' detachments from Omsk and Ekaterinburg came to Tobolsk, at the beginning of 1918, the old authorities—the provincial commissary and the Town Council—still held sway, and even elections to the District Council were held.

This political situation at Tobolsk aroused comprehensible suspicions among the workers of the Urals and Siberia, and produced apprehensions as to the reliability of the guard, particularly of its commissary. “I began,” writes Pankratov, “to receive anonymous threatening letters from the front, from Omsk, Krasnoyarsk, Ekaterinburg, and even from Tobolsk itself. They even threatened to send a whole division because I had let the Imperial family ‘get out of hand.’”<sup>\*</sup> The Omsk Soviet on two occasions emphatically gave instructions through its military commissary that the former Tsar and his family were to be transferred to the convict prison, and that the provincial commissary was to be arrested: but in vain. Tobolsk and its commissary did not take any notice of instructions from Omsk, in spite of the fact that they were subordinate to Omsk in administration. But these attempts to resist the extending Soviet power were of a passive character, as power in Tobolsk began to pass more and more out of the hands of the agents of the Provisional Government in the measure that the masses realised the meaning of the events at Petrograd.

Commissary Pankratov for a long time endeavoured to keep the

<sup>\*</sup> V. Pankratov: *With the Tsar at Tobolsk* (Byloe, No. 26, 1924), p. 213.

detachment in ignorance of events in the capital. But little by little echoes of the November Revolution began to penetrate into the mass of the soldiers.

The most “unsatisfactory” was the company of the 2nd Guards, where, under the leadership of 2nd Lieutenant A. Matveyev, a small but reliable group of revolutionary militants was set up, who had pledged themselves at one of their meetings to keep watch over the Romanov family, and, in the event of attempts to escape, not to allow either the former Tsar or his family to get away alive.

The influence of this group gradually spread to all the Guardsmen of the detachment. Even previously they had not paid a great deal of attention to Pankratov and his assistant Nikolsky: now they began to ignore them and even to display hostility towards them.

At the end of November a Soldiers' Committee was set up. With its organisation, effective control over the Romanovs passed into the hands of the soldiers. From this moment a drastic change began in the life of the prisoners. The life of the “Court,” which up to that time had passed in an orderly and well-regulated fashion which no one infringed, began to undergo many changes and limitations. The Soldiers' Committee endeavoured to establish a more severe regime for the prisoners, doing away with the modifications and relaxations permitted by Pankratov and Kobylinsky. The Committee began with the friends and servants. The latter enjoyed considerable freedom in comparison with the Romanov family: they could go, not only into the town, but also into the surrounding districts. This had long aroused the dissatisfaction of the soldiers, and they had more than once warned Pankratov that, if Dolgorukov and the others did not stop “wandering round the town, they would get a hiding.”<sup>\*</sup> The Soldiers' Committee decided to establish the same conditions for them as for the Imperial family. The suite and servants, who had been living in a separate house opposite the former Governor's house, were transferred to the latter (i.e., the house in which the Imperial family lived). This measure was exceptionally timely, in connection with the attempts of the monarchists to organise the liberation of the Romanovs. Their communications with the Imperial family were now rendered much more difficult.

It was at this time also that there took place the incident of the wine poured into the Irtysh by the soldiers. Then, as a result of the priest Vassiliev's invocation of “long years for the reigning House” at the service of December 19, the Soldiers' Committee decided to forbid the family attending church, and to permit services to be performed at home instead, in the presence and under the observation of a sentry. With difficulty Kobylinsky succeeded in extorting permission from the Committee for the family to attend church on the twelve principal

<sup>\*</sup> Pankratov, *op. cit.*, p. 217.



saints' days. This interference by the soldiers in the regime established for the Imperial family was well reflected in the diary of Countess Hendrikova. She writes: "January 27. We did not go to church. The soldiers decided to let us go to church only on the twelve holidays": "February 15. The Soldiers' Committee did not allow them to go to church to-day either." "February 17. Yesterday and to-day, service at home."

In spite of the more severe conditions, the Romanovs and their suite continued to live fairly cheerfully. Matveyev, chairman of the Soldiers' Committee at the time, recalls the following scene: "Being orderly officer for the day, at about 11 p.m., I went out of the orderly officer's room, which was situated on the ground floor of the Governor's house, into the corridor. This corridor is crossed at right angles by another, leading to the staircase. I heard an extraordinary noise upstairs, where the Romanovs lived. It was some family holiday with them, and dinner had lasted until far into the evening. Finally the noise grew louder, and soon a cheerful company, consisting of the Romanov family and their suite in evening dress, came down the staircase. Nicholas headed the procession, in Cossack uniform with a colonel's epaulettes and a Circassian dagger at his belt. The whole company went into the room of Gibbs, the tutor, where they made merry until 2 a.m."

Hearing of this, the soldiers decided to make a search for arms in the Romanov's quarters. As a result, a Caucasian dagger was taken from Nicholas and sabres from Gilliard and Dolgorukov. Soon afterwards took place the affair of the epaulettes, which particularly excited the prisoners. On January 16 a joint meeting of the local garrison and the detachment passed a resolution forbidding officers and soldiers to wear epaulettes. The Soldiers' Committee decided that the former Tsar should also cease to wear epaulettes.

"Knowing how insulting this demand would be for him," writes Sokolol, "Kobylnsky stubbornly opposed the soldiers' wishes, threatening them with both the King of England and the German Emperor." But apparently the soldiers were not frightened by this, and continued to insist on their demands being carried out, threatening to use violence in the contrary event. Nicholas had to share the lot of all the officers of the guard, and take off his epaulettes without waiting for the help of the English King. In spite of the promise given to the representative of the Soldiers' Committee, Nicholas continued to wear epaulettes in his rooms, and, when the family set out for church the day after the epaulettes affair, Nicholas wore his under a felt cloak, and Alexei his under a Caucasian greatcoat.

"All these affairs were painful to me," writes Kobylnsky. "It was not life, but very hell. My nerves were strained to the extreme. . . . And when the soldiers passed a resolution that we officers must

take off our epaulettes, I could stand it no longer. I realised that I had no more authority, and felt all my impotence. I went to the house and asked Tegleo to inform the Tsar that I must see him. The Tsar received me in his room. I said: 'Your Majesty, authority is slipping out of my hands. They have taken away our epaulettes, I can no longer be any use to you. If you will allow me, I will leave. My nerves have all gone to pieces. I can stand it no longer.' The Tsar passed his arm around my shoulders, and tears stood in his eyes. He said: "Eugene Stepanovich,\* on behalf of myself, my wife and my children I ask you to stay. You see that we bear everything. You must bear it too.' Then he embraced me, and we kissed. I remained, and decided to bear it all."

Pankratov went through no less pain and suffering through these affairs. Like Kobylnsky, he understood that only nominal power was left to him, and that the soldiers were deciding everything. He also began to think of resigning.

"My position," he writes, "was becoming extremely complicated and difficult, and the only hope which still lived within me was in the Constituent Assembly; but I doubted even if that were not too late. Still, I awaited the summoning of the Constituent Assembly, and had even prepared my petition asking to be relieved of my charge. . . .

"The Constituent Assembly was my only hope. With what impatience I awaited its convocation!

"Even Nicholas II asked more than once: 'How soon will the Constituent Assembly meet?'"

"I think not later than the beginning of January, at all events," I replied."†

It was a deeply symbolical and historic picture: the Socialist-Revolutionary and the head of the monarchists, each praying on their knees for the Constituent Assembly to come and realise their hopes of a better future.

Doubt as to the exact status of the guard and lack of contact with the capital prompted the soldiers at one of their general meetings to resolve that delegates be sent to Petrograd to report to the central Soviet Government on the conditions under which the Romanov family were detained, and to ask for instructions. Delegates were elected, one from each company.

Their arrival at Tsarskoye Selo, before the committees of the three regiments from which they came, created a great impression. Thanks to the stories in the bourgeois Press about the conditions in which the Imperial family were living, the demoralisation of the detachment and

\* *Translator's Note* Every Russian has three names—his first or "Christian" name, the name of his father with "vich" added (meaning "son of") and his surname. It is usual for acquaintances to address one another by the first two. Hence "Eugene Stepanovich" (Kobylnsky).

† V. Pankratov, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-18.



the numerous attempts of the monarchists to set free the former Tsar, the broad masses of soldiers and workers in Petrograd were convinced that the Romanovs were no longer at Tobolsk.

After appearing before the Central Executive Committee of Soviets and the Council of People's Commissaries, and receiving the necessary instructions, the delegates returned to Tobolsk. At the first general meeting after their arrival they proposed that Pankratov and his assistant should be expelled from the detachment. But there were still many soldiers who objected, on the ground that Pankratov had not actively opposed the Committee. This aroused great feeling at the meeting, which dragged on very late and finally broke up without coming to a definite decision.

Anticipating events, however, Pankratov hastened to hand in his resignation to the Committee. "In view of the fact," he wrote, "that of recent date there has arisen friction between the companies of the Special Detachment, arising out of my presence as commissary appointed by the Provisional Government in August 1917: and not wishing to aggravate this friction on a matter of public importance: I resign the charge committed to me, and request that written confirmation of the correctness of my motives be given me.—V. Pankratov. Tobolsk, January 24, 1918."

In reply to this letter, the Committee accepted the resignation, and issued a certificate to Pankratov in the following terms: "This is issued by the Soldiers' Committee of the Special Detachment to Vassili Semionovitch Pankratov, commissary for the guard of the former Tsar and his family, to certify that he resigned his post in view of the friction caused among the soldiers by his presence: and that the Committee recognises his motives as justifiable. Kireyev, *Chairman*; Bobkov, *Secretary*. Tobolsk, January 26, 1918. Seal of the Soldiers' Committee."

With Pankratov there also resigned his assistant, Mikolsky. Control officially passed into the hands of the detachment.

"Everything depends on the soldiers," wrote Alexandra anxiously to her friend Vyubova. "Thank God, they have left us our commandant."\*

This was their only consolation. The retention of Kobylinsky left the only man who sympathised with the Imperial family, as, following the resignation of Pankratov and Nikolsky, a number of soldiers who had shown themselves insufficiently reliable were dismissed. Their place was filled by new soldiers from Petrograd.

\* Vyubova, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HOPES OF LIBERATION

SOON after the delegates returned to Tobolsk, instructions for regulating the conditions and guard arrangements of the former Tsar began to arrive from the capital. The first important step taken by the centre was to transfer Nicholas and his family to soldiers' rations. This instruction came from the People's Commissariat of State Property, and was received in Tobolsk on February 23. The same telegram established restrictions on the amounts which the Romanovs might draw from their accounts in the various banks. Every member of the family might spend not more than 600 roubles a month, or 4,200 roubles for the whole family. Within the limits of this sum they were enabled to improve their diet, maintain servants, etc.

On receipt of these instructions, the Soldiers' Committee requested the Romanovs to adjust their expenses in strict accord with the sums indicated. As a consequence, the Romanovs had to dismiss ten servants and considerably reduce their expenditure on provisions.

The new regime came into force on March 1. On this day Gilliard entered in his diary: "The new regime has begun. As from to-day butter and coffee are excluded from our table, as articles of luxury." Two days later he wrote anxiously: "Now every day brings new restrictions on those surrounding the Tsar, as well as on the Imperial family. For a long time we have been unable to leave the house unless accompanied by soldiers: probably they will soon deprive us of this last shadow of liberty."\*

The severities increasing day by day caused the Romanovs and their suite to await the assistance of the monarchists, of whose preparations they had been made aware, with feverish impatience. The Romanovs implored them to hurry, pointing out that every day made escape more difficult, and that the most favourable moment might be lost. In reply they received reassuring messages that within a few days their loyal followers would do their duty, and that they possessed sufficient forces for this purpose.

The former Empress gave particular credence to these messages, and it was through her that all communications went on with the conspirators. According to the latter, she assured her family that a band of three hundred officers had already been formed at Tiumen, and was ready at any moment to go to their aid. Her faith infected all the members of the family and suite. On March 17 Gilliard entered in his diary that all the prisoners were insisting on Nicholas "remaining on the *qui vive*, in view of anticipated possibilities."†

\* P. Gilliard, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

† *Ibid.*, p. 61.



The belief of the Romanovs in their early liberation was so great that when, a week later, a detachment of one hundred Red Guards arrived from Omsk, they were all convinced that amongst the soldiers were a number of loyal officers in disguise. "The empress pointed from the window to these Red Guards," Sokolov writes on the evidence of eye-witnesses, "and cried out: 'Good Russian men!'"\*

Receiving information of forthcoming attempts to set them free from various monarchist organisations and groups, Alexandra had every reason to believe in early deliverance. Apart from individual monarchists who offered their services on their own initiative, they were in contact, as pointed out above, with Hermogenes, with the Rasputin Circle of Vyubova, and with the Petrograd organisation controlled by Markov II. In January 1918 these were reinforced by the "Moscow Group of Russian Monarchists," who also sent their representative, a certain Krivoshein, to Tobolsk.

As we see, there were more than sufficient organisations concerned with the liberation of the Romanovs. But none of them was connected one with the other, and all acted independently, seeing first of all competitors in one another's persons. Not only did they pay very little heed to the combining of their activities, but on the contrary strove in some way or other to eliminate their rivals from such a high and honourable enterprise as the rescue of the Imperial family.

The Rasputin Circle had most funds of all the monarchist organisations, receiving money from all kinds of sources. From one banker and sugar-manufacturer alone, K. I. Yaroshinsky, the Circle received 175,000 roubles for this purpose. This, together with the intimate connexion of the Circle with the ex-Tsaritsa, immediately placed it at the centre of all activities.

The Petrograd organisation, on the contrary, was in the position of a "poor relation," as the November Revolution had deprived it of the resources which had previously flowed in generous volume from the public chest. Its leader, Markov II, attempted to come to an agreement with Vyubova "for the common cause," but without success. Vyubova politely declined the proffered services, giving Markov to understand, according to his account, that she wished to act independently.

When the Petrograd monarchists sent their people to Tobolsk despite this, Markov states that they were informed by the Rasputin Circle that "it was quite useless for them to try and establish contact with the Imperial family, that Vyubova's people were already working there, and that we were quite unnecessarily interfering and by our misplaced zeal compromising the chances of a great undertaking." In order to impress their "poor relation" the more, reference was made

to the opinion of her Majesty that their work was endangering the cause.

Similar relations sprang up between Soloviev, the representative of the Rasputin Circle, and Hermogenes. The latter was the favourite of Marie Feodorovna, the mother of the ex-Tsar, who was hostile to Alexandra Feodorovna, as is well-known. When Soloviev arrived at Tobolsk for the first time in August, and tried to make contact with Hermogenes, the latter refused to receive him, apparently also seeing in him a rival.

Particularly lamentable was the position of the "plenipotentiaries" of the various organisations.

First place in respect of contact with and assistance to the Imperial family was occupied, as might have been expected, by Soloviev. But the latter sought to draw advantages from his position as plenipotentiary first of all for himself, and only in the second place for the "adored" monarch. The evidence of a number of persons shows that, out of the large sums which he received, only a small amount was delivered to its destination: the greater part was appropriated by Soloviev. His right-hand man at Tobolsk was the priest already known to the reader—Alexei Vassiliev. This priest was distinguished by no less love of coin than his chief, and also pocketed a considerable portion of the money passing through his hands.

According to Dieterichs, Soloviev and Vassiliev reported to their centre that they had succeeded in constituting a strong band of three hundred men, and that consequently it was not necessary to send them any more officers, as the further expansion of the organisation was dangerous. They asked only for money, both for the Imperial family and for themselves. But, in spite of their warnings, new people continued to arrive from Petrograd, sent independently of Vyubova's organisation.

Fearing that new hands might win away their profitable business, Soloviev and Vassiliev took steps to prevent them entering Tobolsk. They showed great determination and courage in defending their interests. At Tiumen they established a kind of toll-gate for all persons trying to visit Tobolsk with the object of seeing the Romanovs.

According to the evidence of the intimate associates of the Imperial family, who lived with the latter at Tobolsk, Soloviev forced all newcomers to work under his direction, achieving this either by tales of the strength of his organisation or by threats, if they disobeyed, to hand them over to the local authorities.

In this direction he was very successful. "The Petrograd and Moscow organisations," says Botkina-Melnik, "sent many of their members to Tobolsk and Tiumen. Many of them even lived there for months at a time under false names. But all of them fell into the hands of the organisation of Father Alexei and its chief leader,

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*



Lieutenant Soloviev, who had wormed his way into the confidence of the shortsighted monarchists."

The same fate befell Markov and N, the representative of the Petrograd officers' organisation. Both found in Soloviev and Vassiliev leaders worthy of themselves, no less ambitious than they in money matters and no more concerned for the fate of their "beloved" monarch. When, in the spring of 1918, the officer N. returned to Petrograd, it could be seen from his report, in the words of Markov II, that "he had done absolutely nothing to establish contact with the Imperial family, and had not visited Tobolsk once while his Majesty the Emperor was there." Regarding the other officer, his namesake, Markov says that "he created the impression of a young man of unnecessary rashness, and extremely persistent and pretentious in money matters."\*

These were the "good Russian men" on whom the Romanovs pinned all their hopes of escape.

It is difficult to say how much truth there was in the statement that the monarchists had three hundred men at their disposal at Tobolsk and Tiumen. At all events, if this figure refers to a strictly conspiratorial organisation, it is obviously exaggerated. One thing is certain, that they had men, and if nevertheless not even an attempt was made to rescue the Romanovs, this was only because the leaders were up to the ears in quite other matters.

Just at the time that the Romanovs were awaiting help with impatience, a dispute arose over the funds. Father Vassiliev, renowned for his intimacy with the family, whom he confessed, and later for his "long years of life" prayer, soon became for the monarchists a central figure, side by side with Soloviev, and "friends" began sending parcels and money addressed to him at Tobolsk. The priest began to claim pride of place, and a correspondingly increased share of the sums sent for the "organisation." He met with a rebuff at the hands of Soloviev. As a result, they quarrelled and fought. Dieterichs writes of this: "While money came through Soloviev, Vassiliev behaved correctly. But later, apparently, he wanted to play the part of leader, and began to empty buckets of abuse on Soloviev, who replied in kind."†

This was the reason why they were unable to make timely use of favourable opportunities for rescuing the Romanovs. In the opinion of Botkina, one of these opportunities was in February, 1918, when the frame of mind of the guards was most favourable, she says. The detachment consisted in the main, it will be remembered, of old Guards N.C.O.'s and Chevaliers of St. George, "nearly all of whom were amicably inclined towards their Majesties. A whole platoon of

\* Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

† General M. K. Dieterichs: *The Murder of the Imperial Family*, p. 73.

riflemen, headed by Lieutenant Malyshev, declared that during their turn of duty they would allow the captives to escape in safety."\*

Dieterichs thinks that the most suitable time for escape was from August to December, 1917. "But at this moment," the general complains, "the monarchist centre scarcely showed any sign of life. This period was the most favourable from the viewpoint of the attitude of the guard itself, particularly among the soldiers of the former 4th Imperial Rifles, the majority of whom themselves suggested that his Majesty should take advantage of their days on duty to make his escape."†

It is difficult to say definitely which of these moments was the most suitable. But it is unquestionable that in either case a rescue could have been organised.

After letting slip two such convenient opportunities, the monarchists were deprived of a third chance, as we shall see—even in less favourable conditions. Just at that time the Party and Soviet authorities in the Urals and at Omsk decided to put an end to the unstable position at Tobolsk. In February a special commissary, V. A. Dutzman, was sent from Omsk to Tobolsk, with instructions to reinforce the watch over the prisoners. He was followed from Omsk by a detachment of one hundred Red Guards, under Demianov. On this day Gilliard entered in his diary: "These are the first Bolshevik soldiers in the Tobolsk garrison. Our last hope of escape is gone."‡

Almost at the same time as Omsk, the Red Urals also stretched out their hands to the "captives of Tobolsk." This finally eliminated any danger of the escape of the Romanovs.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SOVIET URALS

FOR hundreds of years bent under scourge and rod, at the mercy of the Imperial favourites who governed the region, the Ural workers toiled at the plough and the blast-furnace, passing from the meadow to the primitive damp mine. It is not wonderful that the people of the mining Urals have for long years had a deep-rooted feeling of revolt against their factory servitude and the autocracy which maintained it.

Numerous factory insurrections, repressed with merciless severity,

\* T. Melnik-Botkina: *Reminiscences* (Harbin, 1920).

† Dieterichs, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

‡ P. Gilliard, *op. cit.*, p. 62.



brought out of the masses of Ural workers a number of champions who, by the time of the 1905 Revolution, had come together in groups of the Social-Democratic Party. For many years the Urals were the borderland in which the Bolsheviks felt the ground firmer under their feet than under that of any other revolutionary organisation. After the March Revolution of 1917, the Party came out of its underground existence with a reliable corps of leaders, permanently connected with the very rank and file of the working class. This, by the way, explains the comparative ease with which the November Revolution was carried out in the Urals.

Power passed into the hands of the Soviets actually some months before the insurrection in Petrograd. As early as August 1917, by resolution of the Regional Soviet, such large enterprises as the Viriakov Weaving Factory and the Kriaze-Petrovsky Works (Kyshtim district) were nationalised.

After the November Revolution Soviet reconstruction proceeded at an increased rate. The third Regional Congress of Soviets at Ekaterinburg, in February 1918, united all the Soviets of the Urals. At this Congress almost exclusively Bolsheviks, representing the Ural factories, were elected to the Executive Committee. The Presidium it elected was composed of the following: A. G. Beloborodov (chairman), G. N. Safarov, V. B. Didkovsky, I. Goloschekin ("Philip") and N. G. Tolmachev.

The question of the Romanovs at Tobolsk, and of the possibility of their escape, began to be discussed at private meetings of Party Committees and the Regional Soviet in February 1918. Reports from comrades of the influx of officers into Tiumen and Tobolsk, and of the existence there of organisations aiming at the liberation of the Romanovs, forced an even more attentive consideration of the question.

At the beginning of March the Presidium of the Regional Soviet decided to request the All-Russian Central Executive Committee to transfer the Romanovs to Ekaterinburg. Without awaiting a reply from the capital, it decided to send an expedition to Tobolsk to ascertain the local situation and make the necessary preparations for removing the Imperial family. A preliminary plan was drawn up for the purpose, according to which several groups of reliable Bolshevik workers were to go to Tobolsk and the surrounding country. It was anticipated that, in the event of their escape, the Romanovs would be taken either towards Obdorsk, where they could board a British ship, or by road through Ishim to the Far East. Two militant groups of Nadezhdinsk workers were accordingly sent in these directions, and travelled from their works through Nikito-Ivdel and Ukladovy Yurti to Berezov. Each group was instructed to watch all travellers from Tobolsk along the routes mentioned, and, in the event of the Romanovs escaping, to arrest them, come what may.

The arrival of Nadezhdinsk workers at Berezov naturally aroused the suspicion of the local authorities. The agents of the Provisional Government were still in control there, and the expedition was before long arrested.

Simultaneously a detachment of Ekaterinburg workers was sent to bar the road from Tobolsk to Tiumen. They stopped at the village of Goloputovskoe, where they gave themselves out to be merchants. Several officers who were connected with the organisations preparing the rescue of the Romanovs also lived here. Owing to some mistakes on the part of the group (abundance of new "Imperial" banknotes, badly-concealed weapons, treachery of a landlady), all its members were arrested and brought to a village meeting, where they were searched and documents were discovered which revealed their real business at Goloputovskoe. At the instigation of the officers and the wealthy peasants, all the members of the group were immediately killed. Later a punitive expedition was sent to Goloputovskoe, which inflicted a well-merited punishment on the Tsar's defenders.

The most successful was the expedition to Tobolsk itself, which was more secretly organised. One of the Ekaterinburg Party workers, Naumova, was sent first. Her mother lived in the Yalutorovsky district, and therefore her arrival did not arouse suspicions. She was soon followed by N. Hochriakov, a sailor, who came under the guise of her fiancé. Later came Zaslavsky and A. T. Avdeyev, travelling separately with false "commercial" passports. This group was given extraordinary powers by the Regional Soviet, with a view to their taking all steps necessary to prevent the liberation of the Romanovs. At the beginning of April a small detachment of trustworthy Red Guards was sent to their aid, who came to Tobolsk travelling singly and in small groups. Part of them were Letts.

Rumours of the arrival of this group caused great disquiet at Tobolsk. The monarchists felt that this secret organisation represented a direct threat to themselves. The guard over the Romanovs was also disturbed. Dutzman and Demianov, who represented Omsk, and did not know what were the exact plans of the emissaries from the Urals, were anxious. Matters even went so far that Hochriakov was arrested. Only negotiations with Omsk and Ekaterinburg cleared up mutual distrust.

In these conditions it was no use speaking of transferring the Romanovs to the Urals, as both the guard and the Omsk representatives insisted on permission from Moscow. Taking account of the hesitancy of their Omsk comrades, however, the Urals representatives did all possible to win the confidence of all detachments, in which they partially succeeded.

At the same time, jointly with the other Communists in Tobolsk, they began a campaign for new elections to the Soviet. As a result of



this campaign, the Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Cadets lost their seats in the Soviet, and Hochriakov, mentioned above, was elected chairman of the new Soviet. Henceforward that body began to play an active part in the watch over the Romanovs. At one of its first meetings the Soviet decided to transfer the Romanovs and their attendants up the "mountain," to the prison, where repairs were begun with this in view. Later on the necessity for this step disappeared, as the All Russian Central Executive Committee decided to transfer the Romanovs from Tobolsk to Ekaterinburg.

At the same time as it sent its expedition to Tobolsk, the Ural Regional Executive began negotiations with the centre about transferring the Romanovs to the Urals. The Regional Military Commissary, Goloschekin, was sent to Moscow, whither the central Soviet Government had moved. At a session of the A.R.C.E.C. he reported on the state of affairs at Tobolsk and the necessity of taking urgent steps with regard to the Imperial family. The Presidium of the A.R.C.E.C. decided to transfer Nicholas Romanov to Ekaterinburg, on condition that Goloschekin, an old Party worker well known to the Central Committee of the Party, took full personal responsibility. In order to organise the shifting of the ex-Tsar, the A.R.C.E.C. decided to send a special commissary, of which decision the Ural Soviet was informed through Goloschekin.

Gloomy reports were received at Ekaterinburg at this time from Hochriakov and Zaslavsky, to the effect that distrust towards them was growing amidst the guard and the Omsk representatives, and that the monarchists, now at Tobolsk in large numbers, were growing increasingly active.

In April, Goloschekin was sent on Party and Soviet business to Ufa. Here he met Yakovlev, the special plenipotentiary of the A.R.C.E.C., who was furnished with a mandate to transport Nicholas Romanov from Tobolsk to Ekaterinburg and deliver him to the Ural Regional Soviet on Goloschekin's personal responsibility.

At Ufa there was placed at Yakovlev's disposal, to guard the Romanovs en route, a cavalry detachment of workers of the Miniarsk factory, led by Zentsov. This had previously been called a "detachment for the protection of public property." To this group were added sixty Ufa militants with a few machine-guns. In addition, Goloschekin, on his part, gave orders that Hochriakov, Zaslavsky, Avdeyev and all the detachment from the Urals at Tobolsk were to come under the orders of Yakovlev.

Some days later, Yakovlev with his detachment set out for Ekaterinburg via Cheliabinsk. Only on the road were the leaders and a few Party workers of the detachment told of the object of the expedition.\*

Learning at Ekaterinburg how matters stood, Yakovlev left for

\* Zentsov: *Reminiscences* (Ufa).

Tiumen. Here he was met by Avdeyev, despatched from Tobolsk to seek reinforcements and additional powers, as the situation at Tobolsk grew worse daily. Avdeyev received from Yakovlev Goloschekin's instruction to join the new expedition, and returned to Tobolsk with Yakovlev, Zentsov and their force.

A little earlier, the Ural Regional Executive had received disquieting news from Tobolsk. Not having definite instructions yet from Moscow, it decided to send a further reinforcement to Tobolsk, in shape of a company of Red Guards led by Brusiatsky. The new detachment was instructed to bring Nicholas Romanov to Ekaterinburg "alive or dead," for which purpose Brusiatsky was to work out a plan of action with Hochriakov and others at Tobolsk, combining all the forces supporting the emissaries from the Urals, and, if necessary, to open hostilities against the defenders of the Romanovs.

Brusiatsky's detachment passed through Tiumen a day or two before Yakovlev. Preliminary study of the mood of the neighbouring villages had shown that the well-to-do peasantry of these villages was quite prepared for the rescue of the Romanovs, and was ready to grant them and their supporters every assistance.

There was nothing surprising in this. In Tobolsk, thanks to the energy of the delegates from the Urals, it had been possible to create and maintain a firm Soviet authority. In the country, and even at Tiumen itself, this was not the case. Suffice it to say that at this time in Tiumen, in one and the same street, there were two staffs and two notices. One announced the recruitment of volunteers for the Red Army, the other flaunted the legend: "Volunteers enrolled for the People's Army." In the staff of the "People's Army" you could always meet officers, local and new arrivals. It was already a stable organisation, ready to attack the Soviet power in order to liberate the Romanovs.

Brusiatsky's detachment was moving forward fairly deliberately, and Yakovlev's cavalry soon caught it up. Both detachments, under Yakovlev's single command, went forward, and arrived at Tobolsk on April 22.

## CHAPTER X

### NO ROAD PAST THE URALS

THE arrival of the commissary from Moscow greatly agitated the family in the Governor's house. The "big mandate" of Yakovlev, stating that the whole guard over the Romanovs was subordinated to him, and



that failure to carry out his orders would entail penalties up to and including death, caused a profound disquiet among the prisoners. On April 22 Gilliard wrote in his diary: "To-day arrived a Moscow commissary with a small body of troops: his name is Yakovlev. All are worried and depressed. A threat can be felt in the commissary's arrival, real even if as yet indefinite."\*

The day after his arrival, Yakovlev visited their house and asked every prisoner if he had any complaints to make. No statement was made by the Romanovs. Yakovlev, however, ascertained that the transfer of the Imperial family was complicated by the sickness of Alexei, who was confined to his bed in consequence of an attack of hæmophilia. In spite of this unexpected difficulty, Yakovlev decided to take Nicholas from Tobolsk, even if he went alone.

On April 25 Yakovlev informed Romanov that he had instructions to remove him from Tobolsk.

Nicholas replied sharply, without a moment's hesitation: "I shall go nowhere," turned on his heel and went to his room, where Alexandra and his closest friends (including Colonel Kobylinsky) were waiting. During the discussion which ensued, Kobylinsky expressed the belief that the ex-Tsar was probably being taken to Moscow, pointing out the calculations of time which Yakovlev had been making the day before, in connection with the necessity for returning to Tobolsk for the sick Alexei. This supposition seemed very probable to the participants of the family council, and it was decided that Nicholas must submit. Alexandra thereupon declared that she would travel with Nicholas, as she could not contemplate letting him travel alone: he might do "something foolish," she feared. "At this point," says Kobylinsky, "she said something about Rodzianko. Undoubtedly the empress was referring to his Majesty's act of abdication."†

Later on the same day, Yakovlev returned to the Governor's house and summoned Romanov. Nicholas came out accompanied by his wife. In reply to Yakovlev's enquiry whether Nicholas would submit to the Soviet Government's order to leave Tobolsk, Alexandra replied: "Yes, he will go, only I shall not let him travel alone, I will go too." Nicholas only asked when they must leave. It was decided to leave the same night.

As the river was still frozen over, the journey to Tiumen—260 versts—had to be covered by carriage. Yakovlev suggested to the Romanovs that they should take some persons with them, pointing out the desirability of as few as possible: the river Tobol would soon be opened up, and then it would be easy to transport the others, with the baggage, by steamer.

In his discussions with the Romanovs, Yakovlev, as Matveyev and

\* Gilliard, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

† N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Gilliard both affirm, stated definitely that they were going to Moscow. Alexandra Feodorovna expressed her doubt of this, as rumours of the transfer of the Romanovs to the Urals had been current at Tobolsk since the first emissaries from Ekaterinburg arrived. She asked Yakovlev whether this question had been definitely settled. Yakovlev replied in the affirmative. What his object was in saying this, when he had instructions to transport the family to the Urals, it is difficult to say.

On the eve of their departure rumours spread through the town that Yakovlev intended, notwithstanding his instructions from the Government, to transport the Romanovs not to the Urals but to Moscow. Yakovlev's conduct had already caused not a little suspicion, and forced the Urals delegates to pay some attention to these rumours. On their initiative, a special private meeting was summoned under the auspices of the Soviet Executive Committee. All present expressed their definite distrust of Yakovlev, and it was decided, if necessary, to attack his detachment on the road and carry off the Romanovs.

For his part, Yakovlev summoned a general meeting of the soldiers of the Tobolsk guard, in order if possible to win their confidence and support. It should be said that the soldiers were a little suspicious of Yakovlev, and demanded at the meeting that they should also accompany the Romanovs. Yakovlev firmly resisted this request, pointing out the reliability of his detachment. The soldiers insisted. Finally he agreed to take with him eight members of the guard, whom he personally selected then and there. By this means Yakovlev succeeded in making sure of the guard, thereby consolidating his position at Tobolsk.

At the family council of the Romanovs it was decided that Nicholas should be accompanied, in addition to Alexandra, by his daughter Marie, Doctor Botkin, Dolgorukov, Chemadurov (Nicholas' valet), Demidova (Alexandra's maid) and Sednev (the Grand Duchess' servant).

Although Moscow was, in the eyes of the Romanovs, preferable to the Urals, they nevertheless understood that in either case their hopes of escape were finally collapsing. Two days before their departure they sent to the Moscow monarchist organisation a cypher telegram, anxiously asking for advice and help. It said: "The doctors have demanded an immediate departure for the south, to a health resort. This demand greatly disturbs us. We think the journey is undesirable. Please give us your advice. The position is most difficult."

Krivoshein, the monarchist already mentioned, says that the reply was approximately as follows: "Unfortunately we have no information throwing any light on the reasons for this demand. Not knowing the position of the patient and all the circumstances, it is extremely difficult to give definite advice, but we suggest that the departure be



postponed as long as possible, and that you give way only in the last resort to a categorical demand from the doctors." Shortly afterwards a second telegram was received by the same means from Tobolsk: "We must submit to the doctors."\*

In spite of their submitting to the "doctors'" orders, the Romanovs passionately hoped that the moment of departure would be postponed. Their last hope was that the flooding of the river Tobol, which was expected any day, would begin.

"I know, I am convinced," said Alexandra the evening before, that the river will overflow to-night, and then our departure must willy-nilly be postponed. This will give us time to get out of this terrible position. If a miracle is necessary, I am sure a miracle will take place."†

But there was no miracle.

At 4 a.m. on April 26 the carriages were in the courtyard of the Governor's house. The whole distance to Tiumen had to be covered in open box-carriages (tarantass). Only one covered tarantass, resembling a coach, could be found.

At 6 a.m. the passengers took their seats. Yakovlev himself took his seat by Nicholas Romanov, Alexandra and Marie entered the covered carriage, the remainder took their places in the other box-carriages, and the expedition set out, surrounded by Yakovlev's cavalry and eight soldiers of the Tobolsk guard with two machine-guns.

At the outset they had to cross the river Irtysh. The ice was already weak, and the crossing involved a certain risk: the wheels were up to the axle in water. However, slowly but surely the whole train got across.

The halts had been determined beforehand, and the necessary vehicles collected from the surrounding country. Delay was only caused by the covered carriage, for which relays of horses had to be found. At the stopping-places Yakovlev was very attentive to the Romanovs, and spent the greater part of his time by Alexandra and Marie, distracting them by conversation.

They were to stay the night in the village of Bochalino, on the banks of the Tobol, at the point where the Tavda flows into it below the village of Iovlev. They arrived fairly late. A two-storied house had been prepared. Yakovlev's detachment was given charge of the outer guard, while the eight soldiers from Tobolsk were put on the inner guard. The Romanovs had camp-beds with them, thanks to which they were able to rest in the room allotted to them with a certain amount of comfort.

Zaslavsky had arrived at Iovlev a little earlier, with a small detachment and machine-guns. Yakovlev's group was followed by the Urals

\*N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

† *Ibid.*, p. 46.

detachment, under the command of Brusiatsky: these also halted at Bochalino. They had finally come to the conclusion that Yakovlev was unreliable. At first the thought of taking away the Imperial family from him by force crossed their minds. Yakovlev, suspecting this, did not wait to be attacked, but summoned Brusiatsky's second-in-command to himself and arrested him. No conflict took place, as Yakovlev later set him at liberty, while Zaslavsky gave up the idea of an attack, thinking it more prudent to insist on the Romanovs being delivered at Ekaterinburg.

At 8 a.m. the expedition set out again. The ice on the river Tobol, over which they now had to cross, had already begun to break up, and for safety's sake it was decided to cross on foot, part of the way over the ice, and in places, where there was open water, over hastily constructed bridges.

In the evening they arrived at Pokrovskoye. The relay of horses was drawn up just opposite the house of Rasputin. All the windows of the house were filled with people waving white handkerchiefs. Alexandra replied to these greetings from her tarantass.

At the last halt before Tiumen the travellers were met by Nemtzev, chairman of the Tiumen Soviet. After a talk with Yakovlev, he returned to Tiumen, and shortly after him the detachment set out again. Some versts from the town they were met by a squadron of cavalry, sent out as an escort.

Late at night on April 27 they arrived at Tiumen, where a train was in readiness on the Ekaterinburg line. The Romanovs were placed in the middle coupes of a first-class car, while Yakovlev and a section of the guard took the end coupes. The loading of the baggage was completed by 1 a.m. Nemtzev arrived at the station about this time, and Yakovlev went with him to the telegraph office, to get on to the direct Moscow line. Returning, Yakovlev informed his colleagues and Avdeyev (whom he did not allow to leave the carriage) that, by order of the capital, he was to take the Romanovs not to Ekaterinburg but to Moscow, via Omsk-Cheliabinsk-Samara. Avdeyev succeeded in notifying his colleagues from the Urals of the change of route, and asked them to inform Ekaterinburg.

About 5 a.m. on April 28 the train carrying the Romanovs left for Omsk. Later on it was established that Yakovlev, knowing that execution awaited the Romanovs, decided to save them, and to alight with them on the way to Samara and to hide them for a time in the hills of the Sima district.

Even before Yakovlev left Tobolsk, the Presidium of the Ural Regional Council had despatched a special representative to Tiumen, with instructions to send regular information about the movements of the Romanovs, and to report at once when their train left for Ekaterinburg. According to their calculations, the train was to leave Tiumen



in the early morning of April 28. Suddenly telegrams ceased to arrive from Tiumen, and the message expected at 6 a.m.—that the train had left—never came. The Presidium got no reply to its repeated enquiries until 10 a.m., when it was informed that the train had left Tiumen early in the morning with all lights extinguished in the direction of Omsk. This telegram was sent by Brusiatsky, who arrived at Tiumen with his detachment after Yakovlev had left.

A special meeting of the Presidium was immediately summoned, to which representatives of the regional committees of the Communist and left Socialist-Revolutionary Parties were invited. The meeting decided to declare Yakovlev a traitor to the revolution and to send out a telegram "to all, to all, to all."

This telegram, which was sent immediately, stated that the A.R.C.E.C. had instructed Yakovlev to organise and carry out the transfer of the Romanovs from Tobolsk to Ekaterinburg. In spite of this, and without the knowledge of the Ural Soviet, he had diverted the train to Omsk. The message ended by proclaiming Yakovlev a traitor and an outlaw.

At the same time the Regional Soviet entered into direct communication with Omsk, where an old Communist, Kosarev, was at that time chairman of the West Siberian Soviet. He was asked to take immediate and decisive steps to prevent the train proceeding to Siberia or to Cheliabinsk (through Kulomzino). The Omsk Soviet immediately sent a considerable force to Kulomzino, with instructions to stop Yakovlev's train and turn it back to Tiumen.

At this time the 4th Ural Regional Conference of the Russian Communist Party was taking place at Ekaterinburg. There were present 102 delegates from 57 Party organisations of the Urals, representing 30,278 Party members.

The Conference approved the action of the Party committee and the Regional Soviet, and in an unofficial meeting the majority of the local delegates declared in favour of the earliest possible execution of the Romanovs, in order for the future to forestall all attempts to set free the ex-Tsar and restore the Russian monarchy.

After directing the train towards Omsk, in spite of the instructions of Moscow and the Regional Soviet, Yakovlev endeavoured to convince Avdeyev, who was travelling in the same coupe, of the desirability of taking the Romanovs to Moscow. He argued that, when he was given this responsible task, he was personally instructed that it was necessary to protect the Romanovs against any hostile attempts, while he feared that Zaslavsky was determined to take their lives.

Avdeyev protested against Yakovlev's action, but was obliged to continue as his fellow-traveller to Omsk, being alone in the carriage and in effect a hostage from the Urals, not the plenipotentiary representative of the Ural Soviet.

When he came near to Omsk, Yakovlev learned from the railway staff of the telegram from the Regional Soviet. From them, too, he learned that Omsk was preparing to stop the train, and had sent armed forces for this purpose to Kulomzino, the junction for Cheliabinsk. Yakovlev held a conference with his assistants, and decided to halt the train at Liublinskaya, whence he, with a locomotive and one carriage, accompanied by a few of his comrades, left on the evening of April 28 for Omsk.

There the chairman of the West Siberia Soviet, in accordance with his conversation with Ekaterinburg, ordered him to carry the Romanovs to the latter town. Yakovlev insisted on a preliminary conversation by direct wire with Moscow. Together with the chairman, he called J. M. Sverdlov (chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee) to the telegraph and explained the circumstances which had prompted him to change the route. An instruction was at once given by Moscow that he must take the Romanovs to Ekaterinburg, and hand them over there to the Ural Regional Soviet.

Seeing that he could not break through Kulomzino by force, Yakovlev decided this time to submit. The train turned back from Liublinskaya and proceeded to Tiumen. Although the real reason for the change of direction was concealed from the Romanovs, and damage to the line given as the explanation, fragmentary conversations, together with what was not said, were sufficient to give them to understand that they were no longer bound for Moscow.

They passed through Tiumen at night. Brusiatsky with his whole detachment were waiting here. As soon as it became known that the train had passed through without stopping, Brusiatsky had a special train assembled and set off in Yakovlev's wake.

At Kamyshlov, in the morning, Brusiatsky met Brainitsky, the commander of his regiment, who had been sent forward with a battalion to meet Yakovlev, but had not seen the train. Again suspicion arose, this time whether Yakovlev had not turned off at Bogdanovitch on to the branch line to Shadrinsk. Enquiries by telegraph, however, made it certain that the train had passed Bogdanovitch and was on its way to Ekaterinburg.

The morning of April 30 found the Romanovs in great anxiety. P. M. Matveyev thus describes Nicholas' frame of mind before they reached Ekaterinburg:

"When we began to approach Ekaterinburg, I ordered my boys to get ready, dressed and went out on to the platform of the car to instruct the sentries. Returning to the carriage, I met Nicholas coming out of the coupe which I and other comrades occupied. Romanov suddenly asked me:

"Tell me, is it definitely settled that we shall stay at Ekaterinburg?"



"Receiving my reply in the affirmative, he said:

"I would have gone anywhere but to the Urals."

"When I asked what difference it made where he went, since the Soviet power extended all over Russia, he replied that he nevertheless would not care to stay in the Urals, as judging from the local papers the workers there were bitterly hostile to him."

When the train stopped at "Ekaterinburg I" station, it was learned that a vast crowd had assembled to meet it, and was demanding to be shown the Romanovs. By arrangement with the representative of the Regional Soviet, it was decided to move the train back to "Ekaterinburg II," on the other side of the town. Here they had to hand over the Romanovs.

## CHAPTER XI

### AT THE CAPITAL OF THE URALS

THE train was met at the station by Beloborodov and Didkovsky, on behalf of the Regional Soviet, to take over the Romanovs from Yakovlev. The Imperial family were accommodated in an automobile, Didkovsky taking the front seat with the driver. Beloborodov and Avdeyev went in a second car. Both cars passed through the city without any guard.

In anticipation of the Romanovs' arrival, the Soviet had had prepared for them the private house of an engineer, N. N. Ipatiev, at the corner of Voznesensky Prospekt (now Karl Liebknecht Street) and Voznesensky Lane. The house is situated at the top of a hill which dominates the city. Voznesensky Lane begins the descent to the large lake in the centre of the city, and thus the Ipatiev house is on an incline, so that the lower story is a semi-basement on one side and above the street level on the other. The upper story is entered from the square, a sloping drive leading down from the square to the main entrance. The house was well chosen, being in the centre of the city and convenient strategically.

The owner was given twenty-four hours to vacate the house. All the goods except the furniture were stored away, under receipt of the Soviet representatives, and sealed. A fence, shutting off the view of

the house from the street, was hastily erected. Subsequently a second high fence was put up along the facade down the hill, through the square, and also round the garden, which was situated below the house.

The same evening a meeting of the Regional Executive was held, and Yakovlev was invited. He attended the meeting in the company of some of his colleagues and the guardsmen from Tobolsk. Reports were made by Zaslavsky and Avdeyev. They exposed the "humble and loyal" attitude of Yakovlev, both at Tobolsk and on the journey, and demanded an immediate search in the train, the disarming of the guardsmen, and the arrest of Yakovlev.

In reply to these charges, Yakovlev said that, although it was true that he had received instructions in Moscow to deliver the Romanovs to Ekaterinburg, he also had verbal orders from J. M. Sverdlov to protect the Romanovs by every possible means. In view of the attitude at Tobolsk of Zaslavsky and Avdeyev, who, he was convinced, were preparing an attempt against the Romanovs' lives, he decided to inform the A.R.C.E.C. of his apprehensions. The conversation with the A.R.C.E.C. took place by direct wire, and Yakovlev produced the tape record. The latter showed that Yakovlev, distrusting the Ural Soviet and hoping to preserve the "person" of Nicholas Romanov, had asked the A.R.C.E.C. for permission to take the former Tsar to his home in the Ufa province, and for the time being to conceal him in a place known to himself, "in the hills." The A.R.C.E.C., of course, rejected this suggestion.

It was then that Yakovlev, according to his story, being afraid to proceed to Ekaterinburg direct from Tiumen, lest Zaslavsky should attack the train, took the Romanovs by the circuitous route through Omsk (Kulomzino) and Cheliabinsk.

Naturally, this explanation did not satisfy the Executive, but since the Romanovs were already under a reliable guard in the Ipatiev house, it was decided to let Yakovlev return to Moscow. He was given an official receipt, signed by Beloborodov, chairman of the Soviet, and the vice-chairman Didkovsky, certifying that the Ural Soviet had received from Tobolsk (1) the ex-Tsar Nicholas Alexandrovitch Romanov, (2) the ex-Tsaritsa Alexandra Feodorovna Romanov, (3) the ex-Grand Duchess Marie Nikolaevna Romanov, for detention under guard at Ekaterinburg.

Yakovlev and his detachment left, while the eight members of the former guard, under Lieutenant Matveyev, were disarmed and sent back to Tobolsk.

The appointment of Yakovlev as special commissary of the A.R.C.E.C. was undoubtedly a mistake. Later he betrayed the Revolution. After his return to Moscow he was given a command on the Samara front, and in October 1918 attempted to lead his whole

\* From Matveyev's unpublished M.S., *Tsarskoye Selo-Tobolsk-Ekaterinburg*.



army over to Kolchak. The army would not follow him, however, and he fled to the Whites with a few officers.

A letter soon appeared in the White papers of Ufa, in which Yakovlev made public recantation and repentance of his Bolshevik "sins." According to R. Wilton, Yakovlev later was appointed to one of the White armies on the southern front.

As soon as the river was clear for navigation, the remaining members of the Imperial family were also transferred to Ekaterinburg. On May 20 they were taken on board the same steamship *Rus* on which they had come to Tobolsk. They were accompanied by twenty-seven members of the "suite" and household.

Early on May 23 the Romanov children arrived at Ekaterinburg, and were taken by droschky from the station to the Ipatiev house. Of those who had accompanied them, General Tatischev, Hendrikova, Schneider and Volkov were at once sent to gaol. A few days later they were joined by Chemodurov, Nagorny, and Ivan Sednev, who had come with the ex-Tsar in April. Only five persons were given access to the Romanovs: Doctor Botkin, the cook Haritonov, the valet Trunp, the kitchen-boy Leonid Sednev, and the chambermaid Demidova. All the others, with the exception of those in prison and Doctor Derevenko, were requested to leave the territory of the Urals. Derevenko was permitted to remain at liberty in Ekaterinburg.

Only now, after their transfer to the Urals, were the Romanovs really treated as persons under arrest. They were under the most careful vigilance of a guard composed of workers from the former Zlokazov Brothers' factory and the Sysertscoe Works. "A mere glance at the plans of the Ipatiev house," writes N. Sokolov, "is sufficient to show that, under such a guard, the Imperial family was in a trap with no way out."

The internal regime of the Romanov household was also much altered. There was no longer the abundance, the relatively wide tolerance, which they enjoyed at Tobolsk.

"The day passed usually as follows," writes the valet Chemodurov. "In the morning the whole family drank tea, with black bread left over from the day before. Dinner was at two, and was sent already prepared from the local Soviet" (dining-room P.B.). "It consisted of meat soup and a roast, usually cutlets. As we had not brought table linen or silver with us, and here were given nothing, dinner was served on a bare table: the plates and generally the service were very poor. For supper the same dishes were served. Exercise in the garden was only permitted once a day, for fifteen or twenty minutes, and during this period the garden was entirely surrounded by guards. Sometimes His Majesty would address a remark of little consequence, with no bearing on the house regulations, to one of the guard: there was either no

reply or a rude rebuff. . . . Day and night three Red soldiers were on guard in the upper story: one at the outer door, one in the vestibule, a third near the lavatory."\*

It will be seen that the Romanovs' conditions at the Ipatiev house bore little resemblance to those at Tobolsk.†

## CHAPTER XII

### THE LAST DAYS OF THE ROMANOVS

HAVING placed the Romanovs under reliable guard, and after taking steps to prevent any attempt to carry them off from the "special house" (as at that time the Ipatiev mansion was called), the Regional Soviet took up the question of their ultimate fate.

At one of its sessions, the Soviet unanimously decided in favour of the execution of Nicholas Romanov. The majority, however, did not wish to take this responsibility upon itself without preliminary consultation with the centre. It was decided again to send Goloschekin to Moscow, in order to raise the question of the fate of the Romanovs with the Central Committee of the Party and the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.

In Moscow this question was also being discussed by the leaders. On his very first visit to the Presidium of the A.R.C.E.C., he met in Sverdlov's office Marie Spiridonova, who had come on behalf of the Central Committee of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries to insist that the Romanovs be handed over to them to be dealt with.

The Presidium of the A.R.C.E.C. was inclined to the idea that it was necessary to hold a public trial of Nicholas Romanov. The Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets was to be held shortly. It was proposed to refer the whole matter to the Congress, and to move there that a public trial of the Romanovs be held at Ekaterinburg. L. Trotsky was to go to Ekaterinburg as principal Public Prosecutor of the ex-Tsar for his crimes against the people.

However, following Goloschekin's report on military operations in the Urals, where owing to the Czecho-Slovak rising the situation was not satisfactory, and the early fall of Ekaterinburg might be expected,

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

† However, the ex-Tsar's diary (*Krasny Arkhiv*, 1928, No. 27), shows that the regulations were not rigidly enforced. Thus, on June 9 the family spent one and a half hours out of doors, and from June 10 two hours. (Translator.)



the question was reviewed. It was decided not to refer the matter to the Congress, which might drag on for some time. Goloschekin was instructed to return to Ekaterinburg and arrange for a public trial of the Romanovs at the end of July, by which time Trotsky would be there.

In actual fact, civil war was spreading in the Urals. The Cossack bands of Dutov, which had risen at the beginning of the winter, were crushed by the guerrilla detachments of the Ural workers: but their place was taken by the Czecho-Slovaks. The Czecho-Slovak mutiny immediately transformed the whole region of the Urals into an arena of bloody fighting between semi-irregular workers' detachments and the regular Czecho-Slovak troops, supplemented by White officers and volunteers. Ekaterinburg, as the capital of the Red Urals, had at great speed to form companies, detachments and regiments of Ural workers, out of whom later were built the first units of the regular Red Army.

The peril of the conquest of the Urals by the White bands was only too obvious, and every ounce of energy was concentrated on the fight against them. Naturally, in these circumstances the broad masses of the workers were little concerned about the fate of the former Imperial family, confined as it was under reliable guard.

But from the first days of the Romanovs' transfer to Ekaterinburg there began to flock in monarchists in great number, beginning with half-crazy ladies, countesses and baronesses of every calibre and ending with nuns, clergy, and representatives of foreign Powers.

The correspondence addressed by them to Nicholas consisted mostly of greetings and condolences. Sometimes there were letters of obviously abnormal persons, describing their dreams, visions and similar nonsense. Requests for permission to visit either Nicholas or other members of the Romanov family were fairly frequent. The reasons given were extremely varied: "To see our relations"; "To render any service necessary," etc. But access to Nicholas was limited to a very small circle of members of the Ural Regional Soviet, while permission for others to see him was given only by the A.R.C.E.C. Hence the constant attempts of various persons to penetrate to him always ended in failure.

Almost at the same time as the Romanov family were transferred from Tobolsk, others of their relatives were sent from Viatka to Ekaterinburg. Amongst these were the former Grand Dukes Sergei Michaelovitch, Igor Konstantinovitch, Konstantin Konstantinovitch, Ivan Konstantinovitch, and Prince Paul, son of the Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovitch. Here, too, was sent Elizabeth Feodorovna, widow of the Grand Duke Sergei executed by the revolutionaries years ago, who was expelled from Moscow. All these individuals lived at hotels under very indifferent observation, and moved freely through the city. Amongst the bourgeoisie of Ekaterinburg they had many well-

wishers, who willingly invited these "noble guests" to their evening parties, at which a secret organisation to carry off the Romanovs was formed.

E. Semchevskaya, wife of an officer of the General Staff Academy, recounts these facts in the pages of a monarchist journal. She states that at the "intimate parties" with the Grand Dukes there was rapidly set up an active group of thirty-seven officers, "ready for everything" to save the dynasty. However, they decided in the end to leave the city and join the Czecho-Slovaks, "in order to hasten the fall of Ekaterinburg and thereby set free the Imperial family."\*

In the middle of June there came to Ekaterinburg from Odessa, according to Dieterichs,† a well-known Monarchist—I. I. Sidorov, formerly aide-de-camp to the Emperor—with the express object of liberating the Romanovs.

At Ekaterinburg he established contact with Doctor Derevenko, who was permitted to visit the sick Alexei. Through Derevenko he organised the supply of foodstuffs to the Romanovs and a regular exchange of letters.

The White organisers acted fairly openly. Enjoying the support of the bourgeoisie, which was growing bolder as the front drew nearer, they were preparing to raise an insurrection at a convenient moment in the city itself, with the object of setting free the Romanovs. The success of such an attempt was not out of the question. At this time there had been transferred from Moscow to Ekaterinburg the General Staff Academy, which consisted almost entirely of former officers who represented a ready-made organised force for anti-Soviet action.

Nevertheless the Regional Extraordinary Commission succeeded in finding the track of these organisations, and some of the most active Whites were arrested.

Amongst other persons, closely connected with the Romanov family, there were arrested a certain Serbian Major Michich, Sergeant-Major Bojechich and Smirnov (steward of Elena Petrovna, Queen of Serbia and wife of the Grand Duke Ivan Konstantinovitch, who had been expelled with her husband to Ekaterinburg). These individuals came to the Regional Soviet as delegates of the Serbian Minister Spalaikovitch, first to ascertain from Nicholas Romanov his opinion as to the termination of the war, and then, when the Soviet emphatically refused this request, with a request that the ex-Princess Elena of Serbia be allowed to leave for Petrograd, for which they alleged permission of the central authorities had been obtained. Enquiries undertaken by the Regional Soviet in Moscow and Petrograd revealed that the Presidium of the A.R.C.E.C. had rejected the request of Spalaiko-

\* E. Semchevskaya: *Recollections of the Grand Dukes*, in *Dvuglavy Orel*, Berlin, 192 No. 15.

† M. K. Dieterichs, *op. cit.*, p. 376.



vitch that Elena Romanov should be allowed to come to Petrograd. It was established that the so-called "Serbian mission" was in close contact with the monarchist organisations which had been formed at Ekaterinburg.

In order to free the city to some extent from the patrons of monarchist enterprise, the Regional Soviet had all members of the Romanov house living in lodgings and hotels transferred to the town of Alapayevsk. But this was not sufficient to eliminate the danger of counter-revolutionary outbursts.

With the approach of the front and the retreat of the Red Army, the monarchists became increasingly bolder in their efforts to establish communication with the prisoners in the "special house."

The "offerings" of the local nuns were often found to contain notes of a far from monastic origin. The well-wishers of the Romanovs were exceedingly ingenious in transmitting them. Apart from notes in loaves of bread, on parcels and wrapping-paper, one note was even discovered in the cork of a bottle of milk.

"The hour of liberation is approaching, and the days of the usurpers are numbered," wrote their friends in one letter. "The Slav armies are coming nearer and nearer to Ekaterinburg. They are a few miles from the city. The hour is becoming critical. The time has come for action." "Your friends sleep no longer," ran another message, "and trust that the hour so long awaited is nigh."

The Moscow papers printed some time ago several documents which confirmed the impression that a plan for carrying off the Romanovs existed. General Dieterichs quotes two characteristic letters, pointing to the existence of such a plan, in his book.\*

An anonymous correspondent of the Romanovs writes: "With God's help and your prudence we hope to achieve our object without running any risk. It is necessary to unfasten one of your windows, so that you can open it: please let me know exactly which. If the little Tsarevitch cannot walk, matters will be very complicated; but we have weighed this up too, and I do not consider it an insurmountable obstacle. Let us know definitely whether you need two men to carry him and whether any of you could undertake this work. Could not the little one be put to sleep for an hour or two with some drug? Let the doctor decide, only you must know the time exactly beforehand. We will supply all that is necessary. Be sure that we shall undertake nothing unless we are absolutely certain of success beforehand. We give you our solemn pledge of this before God, history and our own conscience." The letter was signed: "Officer."

On their part the Romanovs passed over information concerning the state of affairs inside the house. Dieterichs prints the text of a letter sent out by Nicholas:

\* Dieterichs, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

"The second window from the corner, looking out on to the square, has been kept open for two days already, even at night. The seventh and eighth windows near the main entrance, also looking out on the square, are likewise kept open. The room is occupied by the commandant and his assistants, who constitute the inner guard at the present time. They number thirteen, armed with rifles, revolvers and grenades. No room but ours has keys. The commandant and their assistants can enter our quarters whenever they please. The orderly officer makes the round of the house twice an hour at night, and we hear his arms clattering under our windows. One machine-gun stands on the balcony and one above it, for any emergency. Opposite our windows, on the other side of the street, is the guard in a little house. It consists of fifty men. All the keys, and key No. 9 are kept by the commandant, who treats us well. In any case, inform us when there is a chance, and let us know whether we can take our people. A car always stands before the entrance. From every post there is a bell to the commandant and a signal to the guard-room and other places. If our people stay behind, can we be certain that nothing will happen to them?"

The Romanovs lived in hopes of early liberation. Nicholas himself attempted to send a letter in an envelope with a coloured lining. The envelope aroused suspicion, and when the lining was detached, there was found under it a plan of the upper story, with details of every room and of who lived in it.

In the corner room, farthest removed from the guard, consultations often took place. Usually in such cases the family sent Marie or Tatiana out into the corridor, where they sat down on a trunk, engaged in some handiwork. When any member of the guard appeared they rose and hastily went back into the room.

The prisoners were forbidden to stand at the windows, in order to prevent signalling. This regulation was frequently broken, however, and on one occasion Tatiana, the eldest daughter of the ex-Tsar, even put her head out of the ventilating pane of the window looking on to the neighbouring street. The sentry of the outer guard, seeing this immediately fired. . . . After this incident the family began to carry out instructions more carefully.

Inside the house the prisoners did everything possible to win over the guard. For the most part the Romanovs' "advocate" was Doctor Botkin, who often went into the commandant's room and by skilful conversations attempted to ascertain the chances of the Romanovs and the attitude of the Regional Soviet and the Central Government to their fate. Of the Romanov family Marie showed great activity in this direction, coquetting with the soldiers at every available opportunity.

All this prompted the Regional Soviet, at the beginning of July, to



appoint Y. M. Yurovsky, a member of the Presidium of the Regional Extraordinary Commission, commandant of the house, and G. P. Nikulin as his second-in-command. Changes were also made in the personnel of the guard, and a strict regime established which permitted of no communications whatsoever between the prisoners and the city. A superficial search was made in the Romanovs' quarters, and they were requested to surrender all their valuables. The Romanovs drew up an inventory of their property and handed it to the commandant, leaving the valuables in their rooms.

At the same time as it had to beat off the attempts of the White Guards, the Regional Soviet also had to defend the Romanovs against "attacks" of another kind. The Ekaterinburg organisations of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Anarchists were not certain that the Bolsheviks would shoot the ex-Tsar, and decided to take steps to do so with their own forces. A plan of attack on the house was worked out by the "fighting groups" of the S.R.'s and Anarchists, the aim being to shoot the Romanovs during the attack.

However, neither this attack nor the White rising took place, leaving out of the reckoning the counter-revolutionary demonstration of returned soldiers, which was speedily crushed and its leaders shot.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE EXECUTION OF THE ROMANOV FAMILY

ON Goloschekin's return from Moscow, a meeting of the Regional Soviet was held on July 12, and a report made on the attitude of the central authorities to the execution of the Romanovs.

The Regional Soviet came to the conclusion that the trial proposed by Moscow could no longer be organised: the front was too close and any delay in dealing with the Romanovs might cause new complications. It was decided that the commander of the front be asked how long Ekaterinburg could be held, and what was the position at the front. The military command made a report to the Soviet from which it was clear that the situation was very bad. The Czechs had already outflanked Ekaterinburg from the South, and were attacking it on two sides. The Red forces were inadequate, and the fall of the city might be expected within three days. In consequence of this, the Regional Soviet decided to shoot the Romanovs without waiting for a trial. The execution and the destruction of the bodies was entrusted to the com-

manders of the guard, together with a few reliable Communist workers. At a preliminary conference in the Regional Soviet the procedure of execution and the method of disposing of the bodies were determined. The destruction of the bodies was important because of the anticipated fall of Ekaterinburg, in order not to afford the counter-revolutionaries the opportunity of playing on the ignorance of the mass of the people with the "relics" of the ex-Tsar. This decision, as will be seen, was very provident: after the occupation of Ekaterinburg, the Whites spent a long time in searching for the "holy bodies" of the members of the Imperial family.

On the evening of July 16, the persons appointed by the Regional Soviet to carry out the sentence on the Romanovs gathered in the commandant's room in the "special house." The rooms in the upper story, where the family lived, were recognised to be inconvenient for the execution. It was decided to take the family downstairs, to one of the semi-basement rooms, and there carry out the sentence. Until their execution the Romanovs knew nothing of the decision.

At twelve midnight on the same day they were requested to dress and go downstairs. In order not to arouse their suspicion, they were told that this was necessary because of a White attack on the house anticipated that night. For the same reason the other persons dwelling in the house were also told to go downstairs. The boy Leonid Sednev, eleven years old, had been transferred the night before to the house opposite, where the guard lived, as a precaution.

When they were all assembled on the lower floor, in the room appointed for the execution, they were read the decision of the Ural Regional Soviet. Thereupon all the eleven—Nicholas Romanov, his wife, son, four daughters and four of their household—were shot.

Thus on the night of July 16-17 the Romanov family ceased to exist.

After the execution, the bodies were carried in blankets into the courtyard and put in a lorry. The lorry left the city along a route previously determined—through a suburb, the Verkh-Isetsy Works, on to the road leading to the village of Koptiaki. Half way along this road, about eight versts from the city, is a plot of land called the "Four Brothers," from four large pines which formerly grew there. To the left of the road in this area are old disused workings, formerly used in the production of iron ore. The area is called "Gavina's Pit," from the name of a small pond in the centre of the workings. It was here, along a forest path off the Koptiaki road, that the bodies of the Romanovs were brought. They were temporarily laid in one of the diggings, and the next day their destruction was begun.

On the corpses of Alexandra and her daughters many valuables were found—gold and diamonds, sewn into their clothing (chiefly in the bodices of the Romanov daughters, in cloth buttons, etc). All the clothing was carefully examined and the valuables collected.



On July 18 the "funeral" was completed, and so thoroughly, that thereafter, the Whites, who for two years carried on special excavations in this area, could not find the graves of the Romanovs.

After the sentence had been carried out, the Regional Soviet sent Goloschekin and Yurovsky to Moscow. They took with them most of the valuables taken from the Romanovs, their correspondence, diaries and all the materials which gave the Soviet the necessary grounds for shooting the ex-Tsar and his family.

At the session of the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee on July 18, J. M. Sverdlov, the chairman, read out the telegram received by direct wire about the execution of the former Tsar. After discussing the circumstances which had prompted the Ural Regional Soviet in its decision to execute Nicholas Romanov, the Presidium decided to approve of the decision and action of the Ural Soviet. The same evening a report was made at the Council of Peoples' Commissaries:

"During the discussion of the draft Public Health Law, in the middle of Semashko's report, Sverdlov came in and sat down on a chair behind Ilich (Lenin). Semashko concluded. Sverdlov came up, bent down over Ilich, and said something.

" 'Comrade Sverdlov wants to make a statement.'

" 'I have to say,' Sverdlov began in his customary even tones, 'that we have had a communication that at Ekaterinburg, by a decision of the Regional Soviet, Nicholas has been shot. Nicholas wanted to escape. The Czecho-Slovaks were approaching. The Presidium of the A.R.C.E.C. has resolved to approve.'

" Silence of everyone.

" 'Let us now go on to read the draft clause by clause,' suggested Ilich.

" The reading clause by clause began."\*

On July 19 the Council of People's Commissaries published a decree confiscating the property of Nicholas Romanov and the members of the former Imperial House. The latter included all persons entered on the genealogical book of the former Imperial Court: the former Tsarevich, Heir-Apparent, the ex-Grand Dukes and Grand-Duchesses, the ex-Princes, Princesses, and Princesses of the Blood-Imperial. All their property was proclaimed the property of the Soviet Republic.

The news of the execution of the Romanovs was officially published at Ekaterinburg on July 22. The evening before, a statement was made to a workers' meeting in the City Theatre, and was met with a storm of enthusiasm. The meeting adopted a resolution declaring:

" The execution of Nicholas the Bloody is a reply and a stern warning

to the bourgeois monarchist counter-revolution, which is trying to drown the workers' and peasants' revolution in blood.

" All the enemies of the working people have united around the watchword of the restoration of the capitalists' and landlords' autocracy.

" The whole working people is united under the banner of the Socialist Republic. The struggle between them is for life or death, and all who will not march to-day with the people, in its struggle for existence, are in the camp of the people's enemies. This meeting calls on all to whom the gains of the Revolution are dear to enter the ranks of those who are fighting for the social emancipation of the toilers.

" Long live the Soviet Power!

" Long live the international working-class revolution!"\*

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE EXECUTION OF THE FORMER GRAND DUKES

It was in the Urals that the other members of the Romanov dynasty found their grave: at Perm Nicholas' brother, Michael Alexandrovitch Romanov.

Since March 1917 he had lived with his family at Gatchina. Only a year later, in February 1918, owing to the monarchist movement in his favour, he was arrested on the demand of the Petrograd Soviet and sent with his secretary, N. Johnson, to Perm. The accompanying letter to the Perm Soviet stated that Michael Romanov was being sent to Perm on the responsibility and under the observation of the Soviet, but it suggested that no special restrictions be imposed upon him. However, the Perm Soviet could not make up its mind to liberate him at once and detained him under domestic arrest in the former "Hall of the Nobility." Michael Romanov protested against his arrest and insisted on his release, referring to the Petrograd decision as a justification. However, at the sessions of the town Soviet and at workers' meetings, particularly at the Motovilikha Works, the workers themselves repeatedly raised the question of shooting Michael Romanov, in order thereby once for all to block the monarchists' inclination to hunt for a candidate to the Imperial throne.

In spite of the attempts of the leading committees to combat this

\* V. Miliutin: *Pages from My Diary* (Projektor, 1924, No. 4).

\* The *Uralski Rabochi*, No. 144-241, July 23, 1918.



tendency, numerous meetings passed resolutions demanding the extirpation of the Romanovs.

Reckoning with the danger of allowing Michael to live freely in Perm, and with the possibility of irresponsible acts, the Perm Soviet suggested to him that he should be transferred to a specially fitted-up section of the prison hospital. Romanov made a complaint to the Council of People's Commissaries and the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission. In reply to this complaint, the Perm Soviet received an instruction, over the signature of the chief of the secretariat of the Council of People's Commissaries, Bonch-Bruyevitch, to liberate Michael Romanov but retain him under observation, and another letter from the Extraordinary Commission, signed by Uritsky, granting Romanov the right of free sojourn in Perm. Romanov was then informed by representatives of the Soviet Executive that he was being liberated without any guarantees, and the Soviet did not take responsibility for anything that might happen.

Romanov with his secretary Johnson, his valet Chelyshev and his chauffeur Borunov settled down in the Sibirskaya ulitsa—one of the busiest streets in Perm—in the King's Hotel, the best in town, near the river Kama.

At first watch was kept over him by the militia. Later, when the Executive had communicated with the centre, explained the situation, and repudiated all responsibility for Romanov's safety, observation was entrusted on the suggestion of Petrograd to the Provincial Extraordinary Commission, where Michael accordingly went to "sign on" on fixed days.

Living in freedom, Michael Romanov was in close contact with his friends and relations, and there was constant communication between Perm and Petrograd. Countess Brassova, Michael's wife, visited Perm in May and then proceeded to Moscow, where, according to R. Wilton, she had an interview with Lenin and asked permission for her husband to go abroad. This, of course, was refused. Later Brassova was arrested, but managed to escape abroad.

Meanwhile, influenced by the demands of the Perm and Motovilikha workers for the execution of Michael Romanov, a secret group was formed with the object of killing him. It was composed of the chairman of the Motovilikha Soviet, G. I. Miasnikov, with the following workmen: A. Markov, Ivanchenko, N. Zhuzhkov, and I. Kolpashnikov. The group had no connection with either Party or Soviet organisations, and acted in great secret at its own risk.

On the evening of June 12-13 this group came to the hotel with forged documents from the Provincial Extraordinary Commission. Michael Romanov was already asleep. He was awakened and presented with a document ordering him immediately to leave Perm. Romanov was incredulous, and refused to follow his visitors, demand-

ing that they should call a doctor and Malkov, chairman of the Extraordinary Commission. They then said they would use force. The ex-Grand Duke's secretary, Johnson, said that he would follow his "master." Although Johnson did not enter into the plans of the group, they decided however to take him along in order not to delay in the hotel. Both the "arrested" men were put into carriages which were ready, and taken out of the town along the track to Motovilikha. After passing the Nobel kerosine dump, six versts from Motovilikha, they turned off into the forest to the right, and there shot Michael Romanov. After this, in order to cover up their tracks, one of those participating rang up the militia and the Provincial Extraordinary Commission, and informed them that some persons unknown had entered the King's Hotel the previous night and carried off Michael Romanov in the direction of Siberia.

This event was a complete surprise for all the organisations of Perm. A chase was organised immediately, which however set out on the false route and could find no traces. At the same time telegrams were sent to Petrograd and in every direction announcing the escape of Michael Romanov.

For some time the Perm organisations were in ignorance of the true course of events, and only after some time discovered the actual state of affairs from rumours which spread among the rank and file.

After the rumours had been checked and those whom reports indicated as having participated had been questioned, it became clear that Michael Romanov had been really shot, which was published in the Press.

The military situation in the Urals and the execution of the whole Imperial family at Ekaterinburg caused very little attention to be paid among the workers of the Urals to the death of this scion of the dynasty.

A month later the members of the Romanov family exiled in May to Alapayevsk also met with their deaths.

Alapayevsk is a small town on the Irbit-Nijni-Tagil Railway. Formerly a county town of the Perm province, now it is a district centre. As a place of exile for the Romanovs it was well chosen; it was out of the way, on the railway, and, as an industrial centre, entirely reliable. When the transfer of Nicholas Romanov to the Urals was being first discussed, Alapayevsk was suggested as the place of detention, and suitable premises had actually been found. Later, however, in consequence of nearness to the front, it was decided to leave the elder Romanovs at Ekaterinburg.

Later still, Alapayevsk was utilised by the Ural Soviet as the place of detention of the Grand Dukes. On May 20, 1918, there were brought to Alapayevsk the following ex-Grand Dukes and Duchesses:



Elizabeth Feodorovna, Sergei, Michaelovitch, Elena (ex-Queen of Serbia), Ivan, Igor and Konstantin (sons of Konstantin Konstantinovitch), and Vladimir Paley, son of the ex-Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovitch. They were all housed in a new stone building, the so-called "School in the Fields," situated on the outskirts, which was hastily fitted up as a dwelling-house.

At first the Romanovs lived fairly freely at Alapayevsk. They went about alone, without guards, visited church, took walks in the fields near the school, etc. But soon here, as in other places, there was soon grouped around them a close body of friends, who brought the pious Grand Duchesses and Dukes an abundance of voluntary offerings, flowers, foodstuffs, and their sympathy. On the other hand, the workers of Alapayevsk, alarmed by the threats of the counter-revolutionaries, expressed in a rising at the Neviansky Works, near Alapayevsk, and generally by the developing operations on the eastern front, were insisting either on the close confinement of the Romanovs under guard, or on their destruction. Just at this time, at Perm, took place the "escape" of Michael, and the Ural Regional Soviet requested the Alapayevsk Soviet to establish more strict control over the Romanovs, in order to preclude any possibility of escape.

As from June 21 the Alapayevsk executive, by agreement with the Ural Soviet, introduced prison conditions for the Romanovs: parcels from outside were forbidden, all excursions outside the school railings prohibited, and all outsiders sent away from the prisoners, only the nun Yakovleva being left with Elizabeth Feodorovna and the servant Remez with Sergei Michaelovitch.

This change greatly alarmed the prisoners, and they decided to appeal to the Ural Soviet. On June 21 the ex-Grand Duke Sergei Michaelovitch, in the name of all his relatives at Alapayevsk, sent the following telegram: "Chairman of Regional Soviet, Ekaterinburg. By a decision of the Soviet we are from to-day under prison conditions. Knowing of no fault on our part, we beg that the prison regime be removed."

In reply the following telegram was received by Soloviev, the Alapayevsk commissary for justice: "Inform Sergei Romanov that their imprisonment is a preventive measure against escape, in view of Michael's disappearance from Perm.—Beloborodov."\*

With the approach of the front, and in view of the necessity of despatching all available forces against the enemy, in view also of the demands of the workers, the leaders of the Alapayevsk Soviet decided to execute the Romanovs.

This was done on the night of July 17-18, 1918. The bodies were

\* N. Sokolov, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

thrown into a deep pit eleven miles from Alapayevsk, near the Verkhni-Siniachikhinsky Works.

With the shooting of the Romanovs ended the first period of the Soviet power in the Urals.\*

## CHAPTER XV

### SEARCHING FOR THE ROMANOVS

ON the morning of July 25, Ekaterinburg was occupied by the Whites. Immediately on their entry, the officers rushed to the Ipatiev house to seek the bodies of the ex-Tsar and his family.

The military authorities decided to organise an investigation "into the murder of the Tsar," for which purpose they set up a special commission of General Staff Academy officers, under the chairmanship of Colonel Sherekhovskiy, with the aid of investigating judge Nametkin.

On July 30, i.e., within a fortnight of the execution, the judicial investigation began.

Not knowing who exactly had been shot, the Commission sought in the first place for the corpse of Nicholas Romanov. The most varied rumours about the end of the Romanovs spread through the city. Some said that the ex-Tsar had been buried in the garden of the Ipatiev house—and the Special Commission had the whole garden dug over. Someone stated that he had been shot in the forest beyond the Ekaterinburg II station—and they dug up the ground in the forest for a long time. The city and Verkh-Issetsky ponds, where another rumour had it the bodies had been thrown, were searched with nets and spears. Several graves were dug up in the churchyard; but all the searches were fruitless.

Only on the morning of August 27 Lieutenant Sheremetevsky, who had remained concealed under the Reds in the village of Koptiaki, came to the Intelligence Department and reported that before their retreat the Bolsheviks had been burning bodies, which judging from the half-burned clothes remaining were those of members of the ex-Imperial family, in the district of "Ganina's Pit" in the forest.

For two summers, 1918 and 1919—water was pumped out of the pits in this area and the neighbourhood dug up in the search for the "sacred remains."

\* *Translator's Note*: The Grand Duchess Elena of Serbia was allowed to leave the country unharmed, thanks to the efforts of the Serbian Minister, Spalaikovitch. (See his preface to *Autour de l'Assassinat des Grands Ducs*.)



The remains of the Romanov family could not be found, and the Special Commission, on the foundation of rumours, accidental documents and the mental processes of the investigators, formed one theory after another of the possible "salvation" of the Romanovs.

Particularly grateful to the monarchist hearts was the version supported by Kirsta, the head of the Criminal Investigation Department at Ekaterinburg—that the whole family had escaped from Ekaterinburg disguised as aviators, and that the Bolsheviks had executed other persons in their place. When this ridiculous story had been exploded, they began seriously to "work" on the question of the possible removal of the Romanovs by the Bolsheviks themselves. This version particularly interested the investigators. They chanced to come across a telegram referring to the despatch of the specially-secret train in which bank valuables were withdrawn from Ekaterinburg. They decided that this train must have borne, not valuables, but the family of the ex-Tsar. Numerous witnesses were found who saw "with their own eyes" how Nicholas was taken to the station in irons, how he was pushed into the carriage, and so forth.

However, other data of the Commission pointed to the fact that the Romanovs had not gone away anywhere, but had been shot.

A great deal of discussion was caused by the absence of any bodies, in spite of the most careful searches. But, as has been mentioned earlier, what remained of the bodies after burning was taken a considerable distance from the pits and buried in a swamp, in an area where the volunteers and investigators made no excavations. There the bodies remained and by now have rotted away.

On January 17, 1919, new persons were appointed as an Investigating Committee, General M. K. Dieterichs being invested by Kolchak with responsibility for their work. N. Sokolov, a monarchist who had escaped from the Bolsheviks at Saratov, was appointed principal investigator.

On the charge of "the murder of His Majesty the Emperor Nicholas Alexandrovitch, who had abdicated the throne, and the members of his family," Sokolov considered it necessary to bring to trial 164 persons on the other side of the front. A special order was circulated along the whole front in respect of these persons, "that the life of all the persons indicated be preserved, and that they be removed to the rear immediately upon their arrest."

Koshnev, an engineer, was put in charge of work at the pits. With the help of a barge steam-engine, he pumped the water from the most "suspicious" pits. In all twenty-nine pits were examined, but only rubbish was found.

As a result of the investigation, and the examination of persons who fell into the hands of the White Guards and were in one way or another cognisant of the shooting of the ex-Imperial family, it was established

beyond possibility of doubt that the whole Imperial family had been executed.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the monarchists collected all the articles and ashes found around the pits and in the Ipatiev house and took them away as an "heirloom" to the friend and relative of the Romanovs—the King of England.

The White Guards dealt out a severe penalty to the workers and peasants of the Urals. Thousands of them, who perished under ram-rod and bullet at the hands of drunken officers in the prisons of Ekaterinburg, Perm and other towns of the Urals, paid with their lives for the execution of the Romanovs.

The White bandits dealt severely, after tortures, with those few who were involved in the execution. There perished Doctor Sakovitch, a Socialist-Revolutionary member of the Regional Soviet who remained in Ekaterinburg in the hope of protection from the Constituent Assembly, and the worker P. Medvediev, who took part in the execution. According to Dieterichs and Wilton, they died in the most "peaceful" way—Sakovitch in prison at Omsk, of galloping consumption, Medvediev in prison at Ekaterinburg, of typhus. But the prison torture-chambers, which witnessed the deaths of these victims of Kolchak, tell a different story.

The investigation into the execution of the other members of the Romanov family did not find the body of Michael Romanov either. There were found only the bodies of the Grand Dukes shot at Alapayevsk. The "martyrs" were ceremoniously buried in a mausoleum beneath Alapayevsk Church. When the Red Army was advancing, the precious bodies were in great secrecy carried away from Alapayevsk by a certain abbot Serafim, and transported to Peking! Later the coffin of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna and her nun were again exhumed, and transported to Jerusalem, where they were solemnly reburied at the end of January 1921.\*

The workers and peasants of Alapayevsk paid dearly for the execution of this group of the Romanov family. It is sufficient to say that one of the pits near the village of Alapayevsk was piled twenty-eight feet high with bodies of peasants who were shot by the Whites.

A wave of White terror rolled far and wide over the Urals, and the work of the monarchists opened the eyes of many workers to the true aims of the Kolchak bands. Numerous risings in the rear of the Whites, mass desertions to the Red Army of the workers and peasants mobilised by Kolchak, assisted the Soviet Government in the summer of 1919 to deliver a decisive blow at the Whites and to finish them off in the forests of Siberia.

Admiral Kolchak, the "Supreme Ruler" who attempted to become a new Russian autocrat, abandoned both by the Allies and his

\* *The Dvuglavy Orel*, Berlin, 1921, No. 6.



"Imperial" officer-regiments, ended his days at Irkutsk by the will of the insurgent Siberian workers, going to his grave in the same way as the Romanovs in the Urals.

By her victory over the last champions of Monarchism, Workers' Russia drove the stake still deeper into the grave of the Romanov dynasty, and whatever the surviving tail-ends of that house abroad may undertake, they will never raise that corpse from its grave.

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